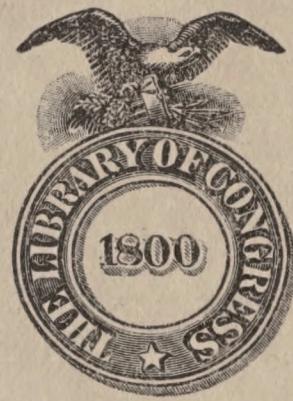


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THE ALO MAN
in Children of the World series



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THE ALO MAN



CHILDREN OF THE WORLD

THE ALO MAN

STORIES FROM THE CONGO

BY

MARA L. PRATT-CHADWICK

AND

L. LAMPREY



Illustrated by Rollin Crampton

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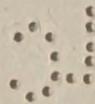
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This little book is the third in the Children of the World, a series of books for young readers which are designed to open up to them the study of geography and history as living subjects. "Paz and Pablo: A Story of Two Little Filipinos" and "Sunshine Lands of Europe" have already been published, and other volumes will be added to the series from time to time, until stories of the life of children in every land are told



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MAP OF AFRICA

KILOMETERS
0 1000 20

STATUTE MILES
0 1000 2000



*Shaded portions represent regions
inhabited by the BANTU tribes.*

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THE ALO MAN

CHAPTER I

THE DRUM IN THE FOREST

MPOKO the boy and Nkunda the girl were squatting in the firelight just outside their mother's hut, where they could smell the smells from the cooking pots the women were tending so carefully. Their father, the chief of the tiny village, had gone with his men two days before on a trading journey to one of the great markets. They should have been at home before this.

Mpoko was busy winding a precious piece of brass wire round the handle of his pet hunting spear, and Nkunda was watching him. Each man or boy of the village had his favorite spear



with its leaf-shaped iron blade, and the wire on the handle was useful as well as ornamental, for it gave a good grip. Iron is found almost everywhere in Africa, and the native blacksmiths made not only spear heads but knife blades and little axes. They could not make brass, which is a mixture of copper and zinc, but all traders had brass rods in their stores, and these could be hammered into all sorts of shapes. When these rods were first brought into the country, they were made about thirty inches long; but there was so much demand for smaller pieces to use in trading like small change, that they were now made only six or seven inches in length. Nkunda had a piece of brass wire almost as long as Mpoko's, but hers was coiled round her slender brown wrist as a bracelet.

In Central Africa, supper time is about six o'clock all the year round. From one season to another, night and day are nearly equal and the time of sunrise and of sunset changes hardly more than fifteen minutes throughout the year. The year begins with the first heavy rain of the wet season, and when the new green shoots come out on the spurge thickets the people know that the new year is at hand.

The evening meal is the most important one

of the day, sometimes the only regular meal. Soon after sunrise on this particular day the women, as usual, had picked up their hoes, their baskets, and their babies and had gone out to work on the farms outside the village. They had come back in the middle of the afternoon to begin preparing supper, which was a matter of some hours' work, because there were so many different things to be done. Grain for bread or mush had to be ground on heavy stone slabs, vegetables must be made ready for cooking, water fetched from the spring, wood brought, and fires made. Mpoko and Nkunda had helped a little, and they knew where, in a heap of hot ashes, the sweet potatoes from their own corner of the field were baking. There would be boiled fowl and cassava bread, and maybe some stewed fruit.

Besides helping their mothers, the children of the village had their own special work, — to drive in the goats from the fields, — and they



had done this before sunset. All the shaggy, bleating little animals were now safe in the pen built of logs and roofed with planks, and Mpoko had seen to it that stakes were set firmly across the entrance to keep them in and keep out wild beasts. Even as the children sat here in the firelight they heard from time to time the hunting call of a leopard or hyena, but no fierce prowling creature of the jungle would come near the fires.

The cooking fires were in the middle of the open space around which the village was built. The village itself was nothing more than a rather irregular circle of huts inside a fence. Mpoko and Nkunda were sitting at the very edge of the great black shadow that closed in the lighted space and, beyond the huts, melted into the deep velvet darkness of the forest. The forest was all around them, and it was full of the noises of the night. The wind was whispering in the great leaves and walking in the tall grasses; the chitter and scamper of some small animal or the call of sleepy birds now and then broke the silence of the night. Under the many rustlings and whisperings there was always to be heard the voice of a mighty river flowing through the wilderness.

The people of the village knew a great deal about this river, but they could not have found it on a map, for they had never seen such a thing. White men call it the Congo. This was the name of a chief who ruled the country near the mouth of the river more than five hundred years ago, before even the first Portuguese explorers came. It was the Portuguese who gave his name to the river. But the Congo has many names in the twenty-five hundred miles of its length. Here in the jungle it has a very long name which means The-great-river-out-of-the-lake-that-drowns-the-locust-who-tries-to-fly-across. If a person knows, as the Bantu people do, how far a locust can fly without alighting, this name for the great lake is really useful. The whole of the name is Mwerukatamuvudanshi, but nobody used it unless the chiefs were having a formal council, and on the white men's maps the lake is called Mweru. In other parts of its course the river was called after whatever lakes, mountains, or cataracts there might be in the neighborhood.

Mpoko and Nkunda talked a little about the river as they squatted there in the warm darkness. Mpoko had been promised that he should go fishing when the canoes went downstream

to mend a bridge that was shaky, and Nkunda promised to help him make new nets for the fishing. He finished winding the wire round the spear handle and began to polish it with great care.

Then very far away in the forest they heard the tapping of a drum.

The sound of a drum in the African jungle always means something. It may mean a village dance; it may mean news; it may mean sudden danger. It is not like any other noise in the forest.

On the other side of the mountain, the great towering mass of stone beyond the forest, was the country of Tswki, the Snake, who was not friendly to the river villages. When he was getting ready to make war, whichever village heard of it first, warned the others. Messengers were not needed to take the warning, for the sound of the drum could be heard over lake and marsh, through tangles of wild jungle where a man would have to cut his way at every step. The drum was made of wood, covered with oxhide stretched tight, or with the skin of a large snake or lizard.

The children had been the first to hear the tapping, because they were nearest to the

ground, but in a minute all the others, old and young, heard it too, and listened. They stopped whatever they were doing and stood as still as trees, and listened, and listened.

Then through the blackness of the forest, far away, there sounded singing, and Mpoko and Nkunda were not afraid any more. This was not one of Tswki's war parties that was coming; it was their own men, singing all together to forget their weariness on the last miles of the trail. A Central African carrier will travel with a load of sixty pounds from fifteen to thirty miles a day. And this is not walking on a level road; the carriers go through a wilderness without anything like a road, the trail often only a few inches wide. They may have to climb steep hills, scramble over boulders, or force their way through matted grasses ten and twelve feet high. There are no pack animals. Everything is carried on men's backs, and



during most of the year the mercury is at about eighty in the shade. When the men sing toward the end of a journey, it is likely to be a sign that they are very tired indeed. Often they beat time with their sticks on their loads. But now they surely had a drum, and somebody was playing it.

At last Mpoko, listening very closely, caught a line or two of the song, and he jumped up, whirling his spear round his head and shouting, "The Alo Man! The Alo Man!" Then Nkunda, too, sprang up and began to dance and whirl round and round, clapping her hands and singing, "The Alo Man! The Alo Man is coming!"

Every one was glad. The Alo Man, the wandering story teller who went from place to place telling stories and making songs, came only once in a very long time. When he did come, he told the most interesting and exciting stories that any one in the village had ever heard. He knew old stories and new ones, and it was hard to say which were the finest. No one could make the people see pictures in their minds as he could. No one knew so many wise sayings and amusing riddles. No one had seen so many wonderful and interesting things

among the people of so many different tribes. Even when some one could remember and tell over again the stories that the Alo Man had told, they did not sound as they did when he told them himself.

Even the dogs knew that something was going to happen and began to bark excitedly, and the slaty-blue, speckled guinea hens half woke and ruffled their feathers and gave hoarse croaks of surprise. The beat of the drum and the singing voices grew louder and louder, until the people waiting in the firelight caught the tune and joined in the song, keeping time with the clapping of their hands curved like cymbals.

Then there was a blaze of torches in the forest, the dogs burst into a wild chorus of yelping and baying, and out of the dark they came, the whole company of them. Every man was keeping step to the splendid new song that the Alo Man led. Each one marched into the open circle of firelight, flung down his pack, and began to tell the news to his own family and ask for something to eat as soon as it could possibly be had.

They were all glad — the whole village — to see the Alo Man, and he was just as glad to see them. His white teeth flashed and his eyes

shone as he greeted one old friend after another, and asked and answered questions as fast as his tongue would go. Cooking pots were hustled off the fire and good things ladled out, and soon the feasting and laughter and story-telling and singing of the Alo Man's visit had fairly begun.

CHAPTER II

THE STRING OF BEADS

THERE was great chattering in the village over the unloading of the packs with the various wares brought from the market. The marketing arrangements of wild Africa are very curious. There are four days in a Congo week, — Konzo, Nkenge, Nsona, and Nkandu, — and on at least one of the four days a market is held somewhere near every important village. All markets held on Konzo are called Konzo markets, those held on Nkenge are called Nkenge markets, and so on. Each of the four kinds of markets is in a different place, but there is one of the four within five miles of every town. In the village where Mpoko and Nkunda lived, the people had to go four miles to the Konzo market, nine to the Nkenge market, sixteen to the Nsona and twenty to the Nkandu, but this last market was quite near the next village downstream.

Some of these markets were noted for certain goods. Mpoko's mother could always depend on pigs being on sale at the Nkenge market, and whoever had a pig to sell would be likely

to take it there. At the Konzo market, four miles away, were good pots, calabashes, and saucepans, some of which were made by women in their village, for one of the old grandmothers was rather famous for her pottery. Other markets were known for palm wine, iron work, oil, or some other specialty, and besides these things cassava roots, peanuts, kwanga (native bread), palm oil, beans and other vegetables, grains and fowls were generally sold in all markets.

Besides these markets, larger markets were held occasionally, from one to another of which the traders traveled with things not made in the country. Besides the brass rods, blue beads were sometimes used as a kind of money, a farthing string of a hundred beads being passed from hand to hand; or it might be used to buy food in small quantities, ten or fifteen blue beads three eighths of an inch long and



about a quarter of an inch thick being used as small change.

A great deal of produce was simply swapped from one person to another. A man might gather a quantity of some produce like tobacco, rubber, raffia, palm oil, or grain, at one market and another, and take it finally to the great market to exchange for beads, brass, calico, or whatever else he found there. Salt is so rare in some parts of Africa that it is used for money, and a man will work as a porter so many days for so many bags of salt. When the people make salt on the shores of an inland lake, they have to gather the salty sand and wash it out in pots specially made, with little holes in the bottom into which the salt water runs; then the water is dried away over slow fires and the salt scraped off the sides of the kettle. It takes less time and labor to earn salt ready made than to make it in this way. Salt is also made from grass ashes.

The packs of the village men had in them not only salt, but many pieces of gay-colored cloth, beads, and wire. Nkunda felt that hers was the best share of all, when her mother called her to have hung round her neck a string of bright red coral beads. No other little girl

had a string half so pretty, Nkunda thought. The more she fingered the little, smooth, scarlet drops of her necklace, the more she admired them.

Seeing her delight, the Alo Man grinned and showed all his white teeth.

“Perhaps they will bring you luck,” he said, “as the youngest sister’s beads did in the story.”

Of course, after that, every one wanted to hear the story.

The Alo Man settled himself cross-legged on a mat, all the listeners squatted down within easy hearing distance, and he began the story of the String of Beads.

I often am reminded [he said] of the three sisters who lived in a land many days’ journey from here. Each of them had a string of beads, but the youngest sister, her beads were of red coral, and the others, their beads were only common cowrie shells. Naturally, they hated her, and one day when they had all been bathing in the river, the older sisters hid their beads in the sand.

“See,” said the eldest sister as the youngest sister came out of the water, “we have thrown

our beads into the river, where there is a strong water-goblin who will give us back twice as many. Throw your own beads into the river and then you will have two strings of coral beads, and two is always better than one."

"Except when you have a lame foot," said the other sister, giggling.

The youngest sister believed what they said, and threw her beads into the river, and they went down, down, down to the bottom of the deepest pool and did not come up again.

Then the two elder sisters laughed and took their own beads and hung them round their necks, and filled their water jars and went home.

"How foolish I was," said the youngest sister, sadly. "I wonder if the river would not give them back to me if I should ask very politely?"

She began to walk along the bank, saying, "Water, water, please give me back my beads, my pretty beads!" And the water answered, "Go down the stream! Go down the stream!"

[The Alo Man made his voice sound exactly like the gurgle and splash of the ripples.]

She went on a little way and asked the river again to give back her beads. And again the

river answered, "Go down the stream! Go down the stream!"

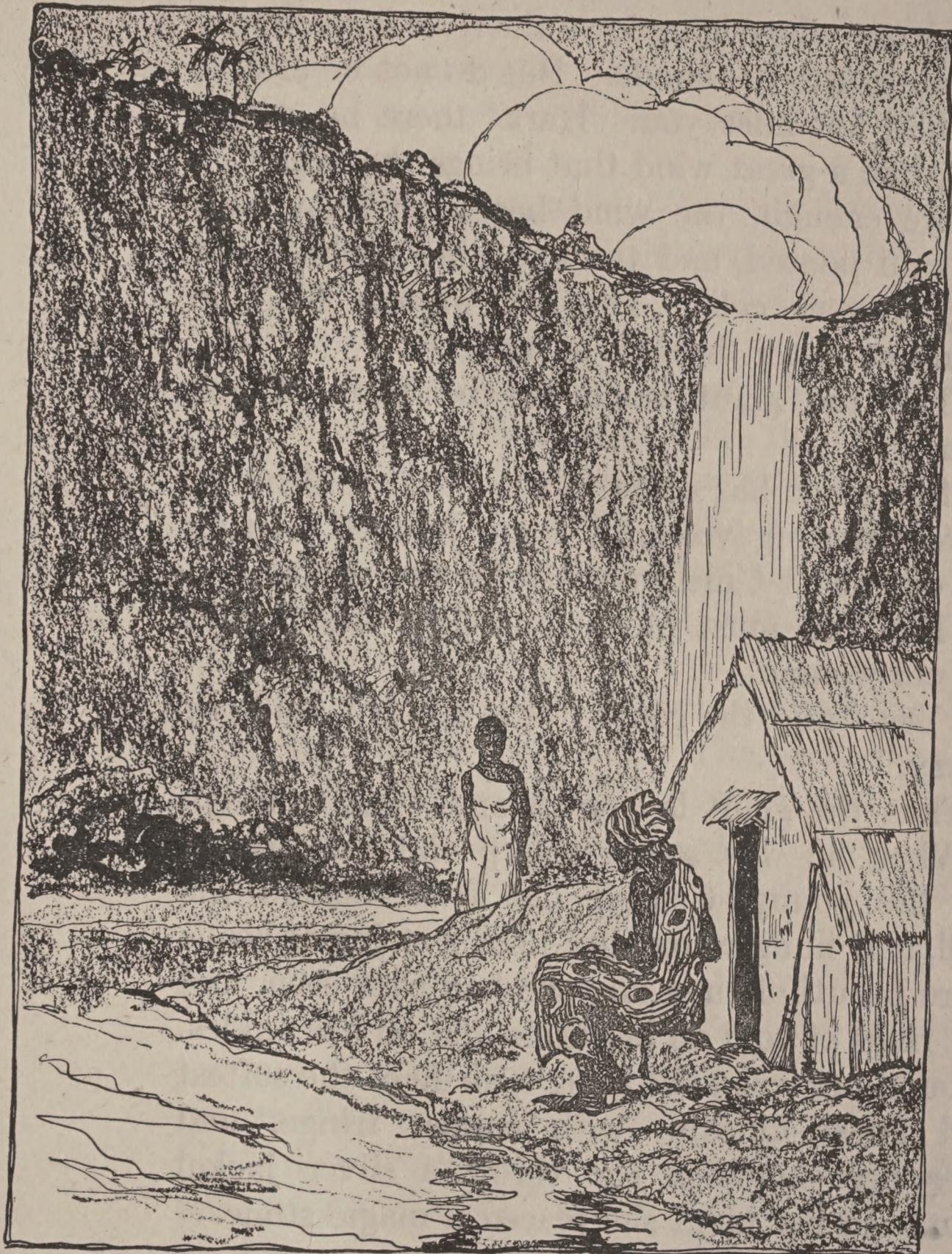
The youngest sister went along the river bank until she could no longer see the village. She had never been so far away from it before. At last she came to a place where the river leaped over a great cliff. Under the waterfall was a hut with an old woman sitting at the door. She was bent and wrinkled and very, very ugly, and she looked up as the youngest sister looked down at her from the bank.

"Do not laugh at me!" said the old woman. "I am ugly now, but once I was beautiful as you are."

"I am not laughing at you, good mother," said the youngest sister. "I should like to do something to help you."

"You are very kind, my child," said the old woman. "Will you be so good as to bind up my wounds and give me water to drink?"

The youngest sister took a strip of her garment and bound up the old woman's wounds and fed and comforted her as if she had been the old woman's own daughter. Scarcely had she done this when the old woman caught her by the arm. "My child," she said, "you have come to a place where a terrible giant lives.



Every one who comes down the river is in danger of falling into his hands. But do not be afraid; he shall not hurt you. Hark! there he comes now, like a great wind that brings the rain."

Sure enough, the wind began to blow, and the rain poured, and the lightning flashed, and it grew very cold. The old woman hid the youngest sister behind a wall.

Then the giant came to the bank of the river.

"Some one has come to the hut," said he, in a great roaring voice. "I am hungry. Bring her out and let me have her for my supper."

"But you must have your sleep first," said the old woman.

"Yes," said the giant, "it is true; I am very weary."

Then the giant lay down and went to sleep.

When he was sound asleep the old woman led the youngest sister out from behind the wall, and hung round her neck a string of beads more beautiful than any she had ever seen, and put rings of gold on her arms and on her ankles. Around her waist she hung a kirtle of the softest and finest kidskin, with copper fringe, and over her shoulders she threw a silver jackal skin. In her hand she placed a magic stone.

“When you reach the river bank,” said the old woman, “press the stone to your lips. Then throw it over your shoulder, and it will return to me.”

The youngest sister did as the old woman told her, and very soon she reached the place where she lived with her two sisters. They looked with the greatest surprise at her beautiful dress and ornaments and asked where she had found them. When she told them an old woman had given them to her, they said, without waiting to hear the story, “We too will go to the old woman,” and throwing their beads into the river they ran along the banks, calling to the waters to return them.

After so long a time they came to the hut where the old woman sat. The giant was no longer there, and the old woman was sitting crouched in the doorway as before.

“Do not laugh at me,” said the old woman. “I am ugly now, but once I was young and beautiful as you are.”

The two sisters laughed at this, and ridiculed the old woman, and called her all the jeering names they could think of.

“Will you not bind up my wounds and give me water to drink?” asked the old woman.

But the sisters said that they had never heard of such impudence.

“Where are the bracelets and beads you have to give away?” asked the elder sister.

“Where are your mantles and kirtles with fringe?” asked the younger. “We come for these, not to waste our time on you. We must make haste and go home.”

“Indeed, I think you must,” said the old woman, “for this place is the home of a giant who comes in the form of wind and rain, and I hear him coming now!”

Then the hut sank under the waters, and the maidens found themselves standing on the bank without even their own beads to deck themselves with. That very moment they heard the wind and the rain sweeping through the trees, and they turned and ran as fast as their feet would carry them, back to their own village, while the wind and the rain howled behind them and the giant pelted them with stones.



All the people laughed and shouted over the ill fortune of the two selfish sisters. Nkunda, where she lay curled up at her mother's side, fingered her beads and wondered if the youngest sister's beads from beneath the waterfall could have been any prettier than these. In the part where the giant came in, the story sent delightful shivers down all their backs, for they could every one remember storms in which the great wind had shaken the trees like an invisible giant and the rain had come pelting down like stones. Sometimes, after a storm, the path of the wind through the forest looked like the track of a huge giant who had gone walking up and down, twisting off boughs and rooting up trees merely to show what he could do. During one of these storms the temperature often falls from thirty to forty degrees in half an hour.

Nkunda had seen a silvery jackal skin and a copper-fringed robe among her mother's treasures, but one thing in the story puzzled her. "Mother," she said softly, "what is gold?"

The Alo Man heard her and smiled. "Have you never seen gold?" he asked.

The children shook their heads. Gold was not found in that part of the country.

Then the Alo Man explained that in the

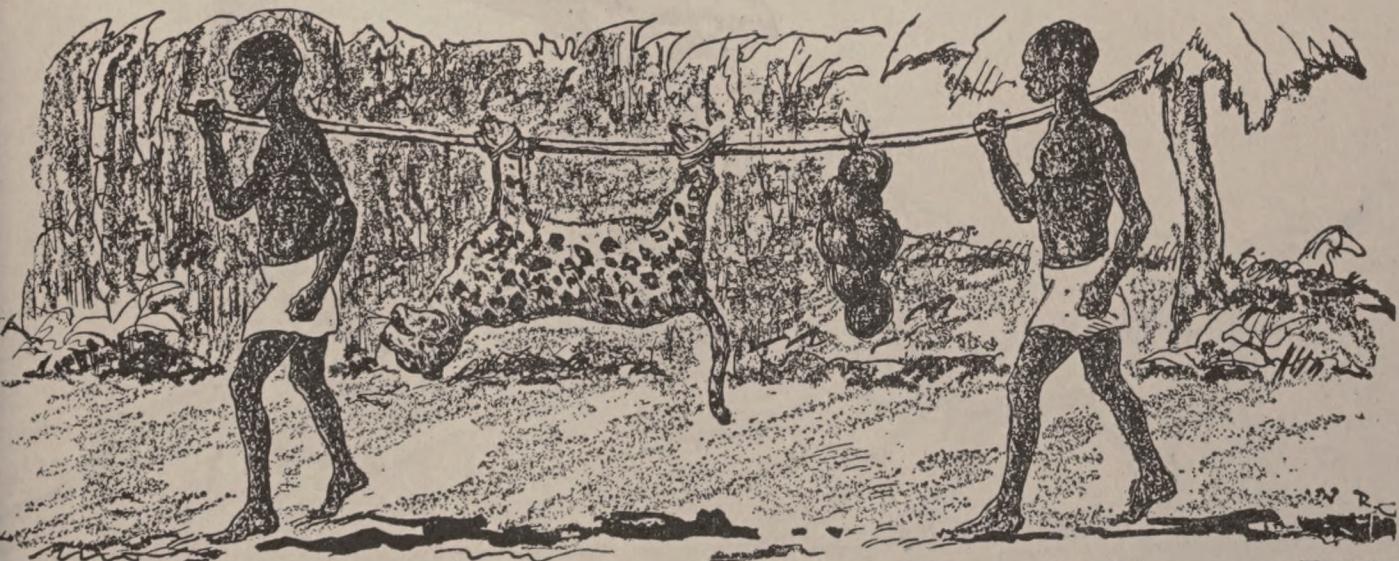
streams of other parts of the country the people found lumps of a shining yellow metal softer and more beautiful than iron, for which the traders would pay much cloth and many brass rods. When the headman heard what they were talking about, he showed the children a little bright round bangle on his arm, and told them that that was gold. It was really, though no one there knew it, a half-sovereign lost by some trader, or perhaps given in mistake for a sixpence, which is exactly the same size. The headman had kept it, first because of its beauty, and then because a trader had told him that it was worth as much as ten pounds of rubber, or more than a hundred pounds of palm kernels, or a load of palm oil, or about thirty-five pounds of coffee. Nkunda thought that the little piece of gold was rather like a magic stone.

CHAPTER III

THE LEOPARD AND THE DOG

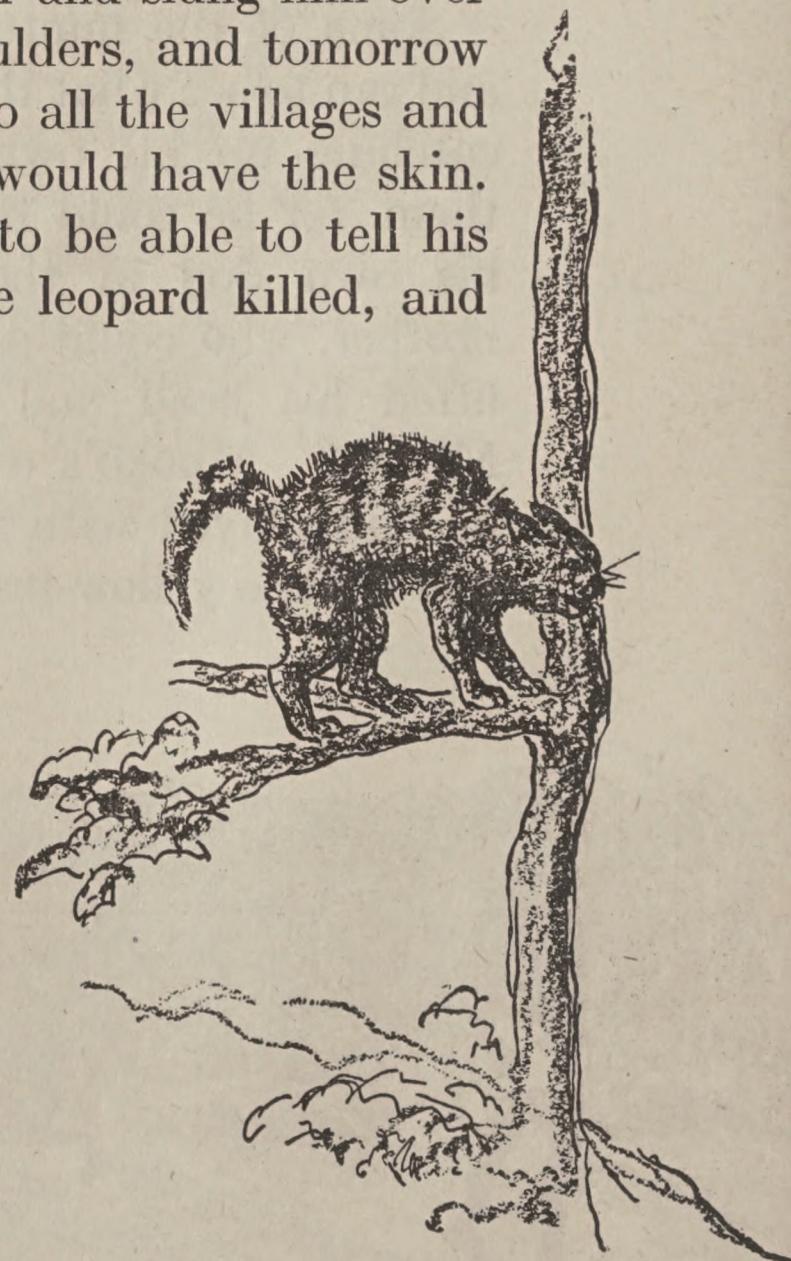
ON the third night of the Alo Man's stay in the village there was a great disturbance out near the goat pen. The frightened bleating of the goats was almost drowned by the barking and growling of dogs, and the angry snarl of some fierce animal.

Some of the hunters caught up their spears and ran to see what the matter was, and Mpoko, catching up his own little spear, raced after them, for he could hear the furious barking of his own dog in the pack. Even the baby brother, who could only just stand on his feet, lifted his head and listened, saying, "Mfwa! Mfwa!" Mpoko's dog was one of the family; he had played with the children ever since he was a little yellow-brown flop-eared puppy.



But the trouble was soon over. Before any one had had time to ask many questions, the hunters came back in triumph with the body of a big, fierce leopard. He had leaped upon the roof of the goat pen and tried to break in, but the dogs had found it out at once. They had set up such a baying and yelping that the robber was frightened, and he was trying to get away when the hunters arrived with their spears. They tied his paws together and slung him over a pole carried on their shoulders, and tomorrow he would be taken about to all the villages and exhibited. And the chief would have the skin.

Mpoko was very proud to be able to tell his sister that he had seen the leopard killed, and



that his dog had been in the very thick of the fight. Moreover, he was sure that when he flung his own spear at the leopard it had gone through the skin somewhere, even if he could not point out the exact place.

“Mfwa! Mfwa!” said the baby, with his fat fists waving at the dog, and all the dogs strutted about, very proud of their night’s work.

“I wonder why dogs hate a leopard so,” said Nkunda, as the excitement quieted down.

“My dog belongs to me, and he knows the leopard is my enemy,” said Mpoko.

“Cats and dogs hate each other too, and the cat is not my enemy,” said Nkunda, trying to coax her pet cat down from the branch of a tree where she crouched, hissing at the dogs.

“Cats and dogs always hate each other,” said Mpoko, and he seemed to think that that was reason enough.

“There is a good reason why the dog and the leopard do not like each other,” said the Alo



Man. Then he told the story of the Leopard and the Dog.

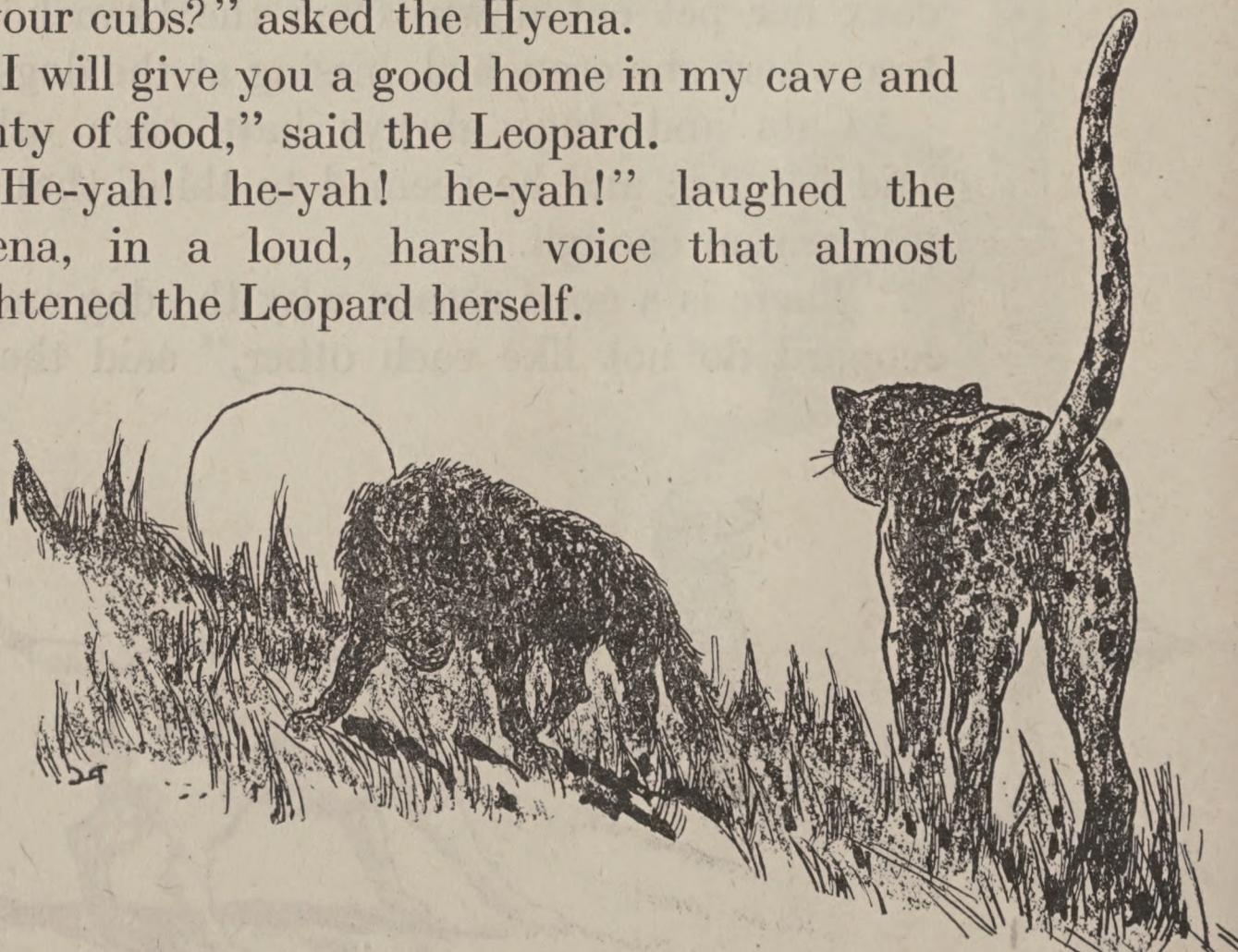
I often tell of the time when all the animals lived in a country by themselves, and the mother of leopards had two fine young cubs in her cave in the forest. As they grew older, she knew she must go out to find food for them, and she was afraid that if she left them alone, they would be stolen from her.

She began to look about among the animals to find some one to take care of her cubs while she went hunting.

“What will you give me to come and take care of your cubs?” asked the Hyena.

“I will give you a good home in my cave and plenty of food,” said the Leopard.

“He-yah! he-yah! he-yah!” laughed the Hyena, in a loud, harsh voice that almost frightened the Leopard herself.



"Your voice is too loud," she said. "You would make such a noise that my cubs would be frightened to death."

The Hyena laughed again louder than before and went away to tell how he had scared the Leopard with his laughing.

"What will you give me to take care of your cubs?" called the Owl up in the tree top.

"I will give you a good home in my cave and plenty of food," said the Leopard.

"Hoo! hoo! hoo-oo!" hooted the Owl, glaring down at the Leopard with great round eyes that almost frightened the Leopard herself.

"Your eyes are too large and bright," said the Leopard. "My cubs would be frightened out of their wits when you stared at them."

The Owl hooted even louder than before and flew away to tell all the animals how he had frightened the Leopard by staring at her.

"What will you give me to take care of your cubs?" asked the Snake from the tall grass.

"I will give you a good home in my cave and plenty of food," said the Leopard.

"Tsz! tsz! tsz!" hissed the Snake, so loudly that the Leopard jumped and was almost frightened at the noise.

"I do not want you to take care of my cubs,"

said the Leopard. "If they heard you hiss like that, they would be frightened to death."

The Snake hissed again louder than before, and slid away through the tall grass to tell all the other animals how he had startled the Leopard by hissing at her.

"What will you give me to take care of your cubs?" asked the Dog.

"I will give you a good home in my cave and plenty of food," said the Leopard.

"Mfwa! Mfwa!" barked the Dog, wagging his tail as hard as he could, and grinning so that every one of his white teeth showed. The Leopard looked at him and was pleased.

[Here the Alo Man, who had imitated the voice of each animal in the story, barked so well that all the dogs barked and whined, and came to rub their heads against his legs. Everybody laughed, and it really seemed as if the dogs understood the story as well as any one.]

The Leopard went to her cave, with the Dog trotting after her and sniffing at her tracks. She gave him a good supper of rabbit bones, and when she told him how to take care of the cubs he listened very carefully.

The next day the Leopard went out to hunt, and the Dog stayed in the cave and did exactly

as he had been told. After a while the Leopard came back, dragging a fine Antelope.

"This is for my supper and the cubs' supper," she said, "and tomorrow you shall have the bones for your dinner."

The Dog thought of the good dinner he would have off those large bones, and he wagged his tail and grinned.

"But remember this," went on the Leopard, "you must never take bones outside the cave. We never eat outside our caves, but always inside. If people change their customs, there is no telling what will happen."

Next day the Leopard went to hunt, and the Dog lay down across the doorway of the cave and watched over the cubs. At dinner time he began to gnaw at the bones of the Antelope, as he had been told, inside the cave. But it was inconvenient. The rock floor was uneven, and



he could not get his teeth into the bones properly. When he cracked the bone to get at the marrow he got some earth into it, and he did not like that at all.

“I may as well take the bones out on the clean grass and finish my dinner,” said the Dog to himself. “Nobody will ever know.”

But when he had taken the bones out of the cave upon the grass, the strangest things began to happen. The bones began to move about as if they were coming to life. Before the Dog could catch them and drag them back into the cave, one of the great leg-bones of the Antelope hit a Leopard cub on the head and killed it dead.

This was a dreadful thing indeed. The Dog had never dreamed of hurting the cub. He dragged all the bones back into the cave as quickly as he could, for fear the other cub might be killed. He could not think what he should do in this terrible situation, and while he stood trembling and whimpering with fear and grief, he heard the Leopard coming.

“I will try to hide the dead cub until the Leopard has gone to sleep,” he said to himself, “and then I will run away.”

The Leopard came up to the cave, dragging a

fine fat wild pig. First of all she asked, "Are the cubs well and happy?"

The Dog was very much frightened, but he went into the cave and fetched out the live cub. "See how well he looks," he said.

The Leopard looked the cub all over and licked it with her strong tongue. Then she said, "This one seems very well. Now show me the other."

The Dog took the live cub back into the cave and brought it out again. The two cubs looked so much alike that he had never been able to tell them apart, and he thought that perhaps the Leopard would be deceived.

But the Leopard gave one look at the cub and then sprang at the Dog.

"You stupid creature," she snarled, "do you think you can fool me in that way?"

The Dog made one dash away from the cave entrance and down the path through the forest, with the Leopard at his heels. He ran out of the forest and across the plain, up hills and down valleys, with the Leopard at his heels. He ran until he was almost dead, and when he had hardly strength to go another step he saw a hollow tree with a hole in it big enough for him to get into, but too small for the Leopard to

follow him. Into it he went, his tail curled between his legs and all four feet gathered under him. Hard as she tried, the Leopard could not quite reach him with her paw.

In the tree sat a Monkey, watching the goings-on and chattering with excitement. The Leopard looked up and saw him.

“Come down out of that tree and watch this hole for me,” said the Leopard. “I am going to gather sticks and kindle a fire to burn up this good-for-nothing Dog.”

The Monkey dared not refuse, and he came down and sat in front of the hole.

When the Leopard had gone away, the Dog peeped out very cautiously.

“I know where there is a tree full of ripe nuts,” he said to the Monkey. “If you will let me get away, I will show you where it is.”

“But I am afraid of the Leopard,” chattered the Monkey.

“The Leopard will never know,” said the Dog. “When the tree burns, she will think that I am burning inside of it.”

Finally the Monkey let the Dog out, and he crept into the grass and hid, for he saw the Leopard coming back with a load of sticks.

"Have you kept close watch of the hole?" asked the Leopard.

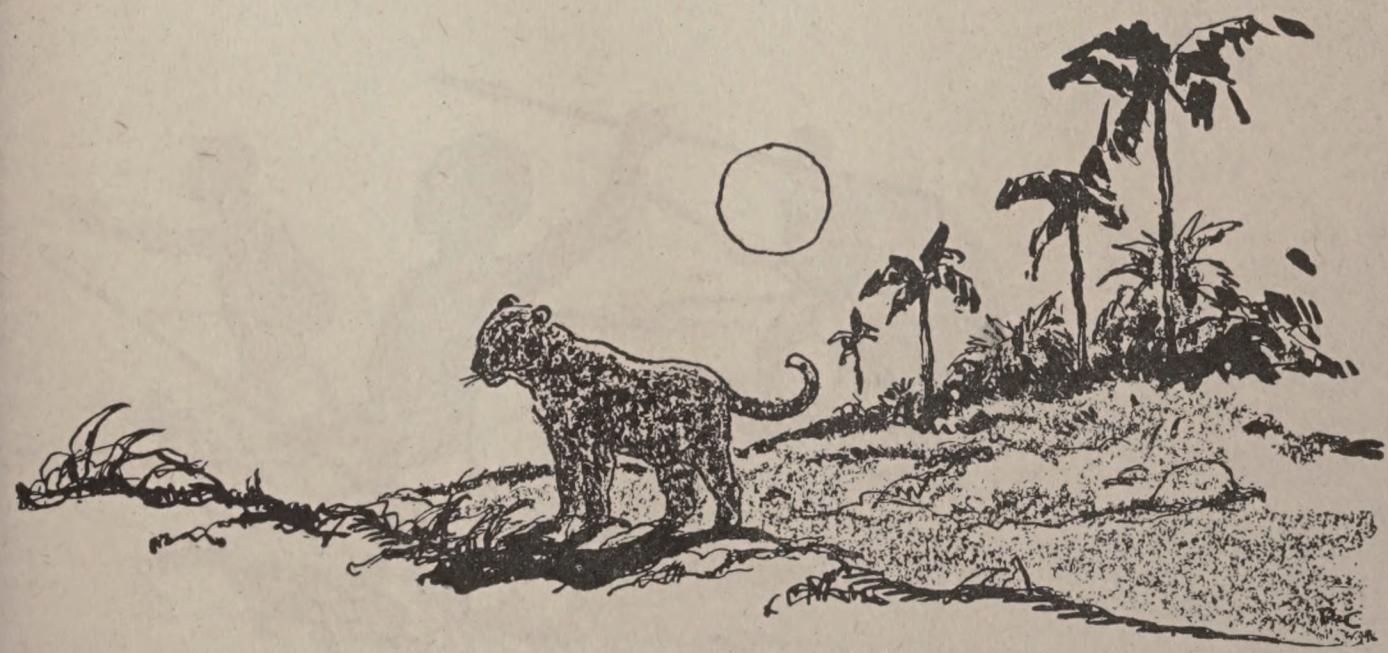
"I have not gone away for a minute," said the Monkey. "I have kept my eyes on the hole ever since you went away."

Then the Leopard made a fire and the tree began to blaze up.

"Hear the Dog's bones crackle!" chattered the Monkey as the branches began to snap in the flames.

The Dog thought that this might be a good time for him to escape through the grass, but the Leopard saw the grass wave where he was hiding, and she made a quick jump for the place. Away ran the Dog once more for dear life, with the Leopard coming after him in great leaps.

It would have been a sad day for the Dog if there had not been coming that way a party



of Men. He rushed up to them and crouched at the feet of the Chief and looked up into his face for protection.

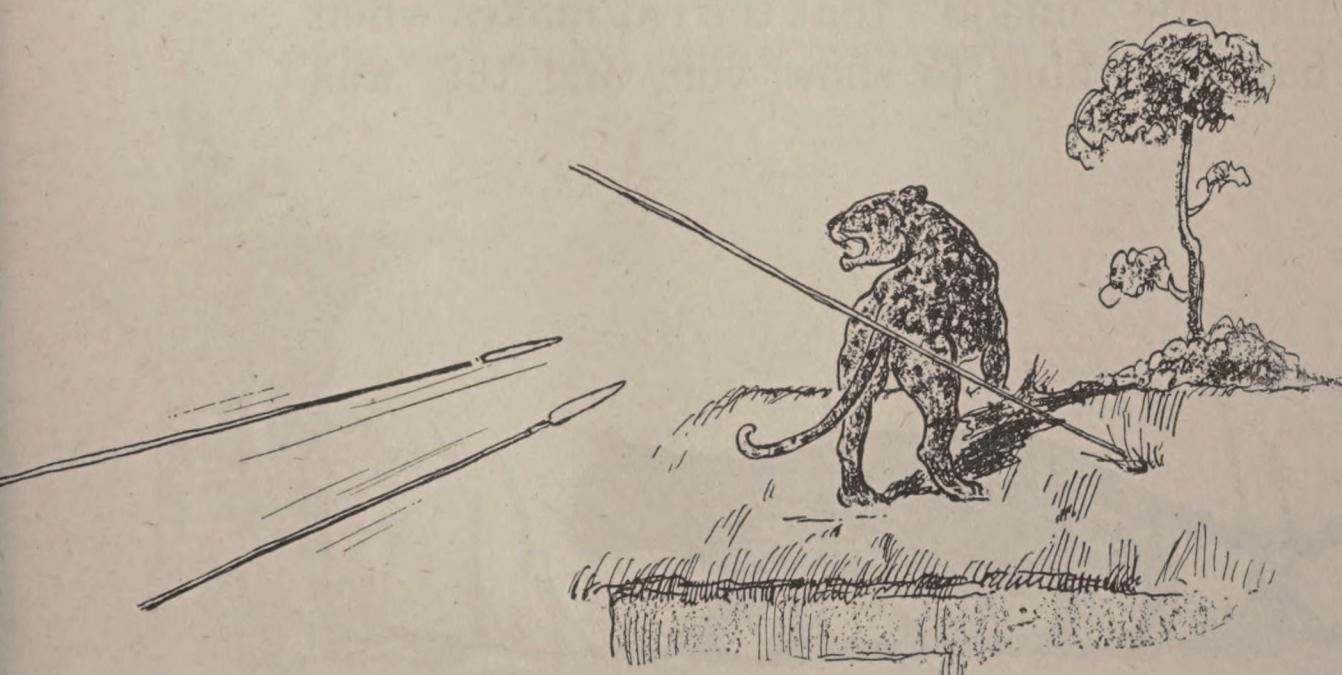
When the Chief saw the Leopard, who had often carried off goats and cattle from his village, and looked down at the panting, terrified Dog, he was sorry for the Dog and, bending over, patted him on the head.

“Do not be afraid,” he said. “The Leopard shall not hurt you.”

The Leopard looked at the sharp spears of the Chief and his followers, and went growling away to her cave in the forest. Ever since that time the Dog loves man better than he does any of the animals of the forest, and serves him against all his enemies; and if the Leopard comes to steal from the village, the Dog will call for the man to drive him away.



“Mfwa! Mfwa!” said Mpoko’s dog, looking up into his master’s face and then grinning at the leopard. And Mpoko and Nkunda were certain that he had understood every word of the story that the Alo Man had told.

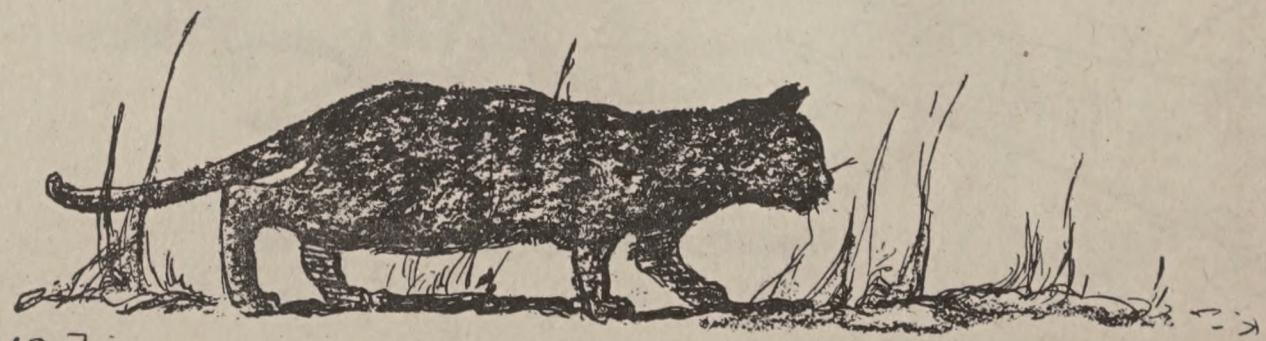


CHAPTER IV

THE CAT AND THE RAT

ON the fourth night of the Alo Man's stay, Nkunda was looking for her cat. She had been feeling a little jealous that day, because Mpoko and every one else gave so much attention to the dogs. It seemed as if the cat too might be jealous, or perhaps the dogs were so proud of themselves that they wanted the village to themselves, for Nkunda had not seen her pet since the night before.

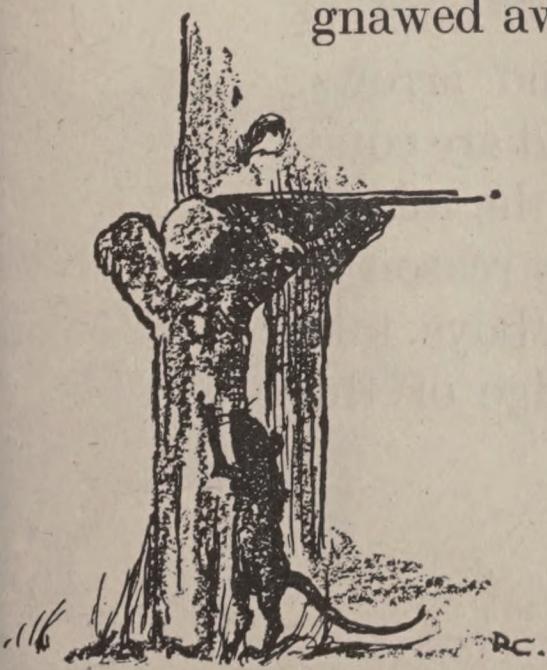
Even the baby, rolling about in the doorway, had missed his playmate, and he repeated Nkunda's call, which sounded very like cat language. In the Ki-sukama dialect of the Bantu language the cat is called Ca-ungu, in the Ki-fipa dialect, Inyao, and in Isi-nyixa talk it is Unyawu; but all these names sound like the little "miaou" that the cat makes when she has something to show you, and this was



the sound that came out of the darkness in answer to Nkunda's call.

The sound came from the direction of the granary. This was a building planned very carefully for its special purpose. It was a large round basket-work structure, plastered with mud and built on a floor raised above the ground on short legs of forked branches. This floor or platform was made in such a way as to keep out rats. Nevertheless, now and then one would make an entrance, and as Nkunda came up to the platform the cat leaped down, carrying in her mouth a large rat. It was as if she wished to prove that she could take care of herself, whether any one else remembered her or not.

Nkunda called her mother and showed her what the cat had brought, and a little crowd gathered about the granary. Purring proudly, the cat led the way to a hole where the wall had crumbled from dampness or had been gnawed away, and it was quite large enough for



a rat to get in. If the cat had not been so prompt in disposing of the thief, he and his family might have gone to housekeeping in there; but as it was, little harm had been done.

“The hole must be stopped up,” said Nkunda’s mother. “The rain might get in and all the grain would mold, through a hole like that.”

“And we must have a rat hunt,” said Mpoko, coming up with his special friend Nkula to look at the hole. “But we must make some new traps and get our bows and arrows in order first. There will be no rats about when we have finished with them!”

“That is all very well,” said Nkunda, stroking her cat; “but your trap did not catch this rat and my cat did.”

The rat hunt took place, however. All the boys in the village came to it, and it was a most exciting time. The farm rat of Equatorial Africa is a rather pretty little brown animal with black stripes, and the boys do their hunting with traps and their small bows and arrows. The traps are made of basket-work and are cone-shaped. They are set in a group in the middle of a large grassy space where there is reason to suppose the rats are, and then the boys take their stand in a circle round the edge of this

ground and begin to walk toward the center, kicking up the grass as they go, and shouting. The rats scamper toward the center, where they are likely to run into the traps; but they have a habit of starting to run and then stopping for a moment to look about, and this gives the boys a chance to shoot them down with their small, sharp arrows. Between the traps and the shooting a considerable number of rats rewarded the hunters, and meanwhile the hole in the granary was well patched up with wattle and mud.

Rats find a great deal that they like in an African village, and there are usually plenty of them to be hunted by both cats and boys. The people do not raise wheat, but they have other things that they eat as we eat bread. Millet, barley, and maize or "mealies" are cultivated on the farms and ground on stone slabs. The meal is made into mush or into flat cakes baked before the fire like hoecake.



The commonest substitute for bread is manioc or cassava, which was brought from South America about four hundred years ago by Portuguese explorers. The jungle people call it madioka. The making of manioc flour is quite a long and troublesome piece of work. Nine months after planting, the bulblike roots are pulled up and are soaked for a few days in pools or streams. The fresh root is poisonous, and the soaking takes out the poison. After this, the roots are peeled, cut in pieces, and dried in the sun on small platforms or on stones. When they are quite dry, they are laid on shelves over the fire until they are brittle enough to be pounded and sifted and made into flour.

Another way of using manioc is to make kwanga, or native bread. For this, the root is soaked as for making flour, but instead of then being dried, it is kneaded to remove all lumps until it is a kind of dough that can be shaped into rolls or round balls. After being moulded into shape, the rolls are wrapped in large, smooth leaves and steamed until they are cooked.

The taste of manioc prepared in this way is like that of tapioca. In fact, the starch washed out of cassava roots, and dried and packed, is

the tapioca found in grocery stores. The fresh tapioca that is eaten in a cassava country is, however, very much better than what is sold in stores.

Kwanga is sold in markets at the rate of a shilling for fifty pounds, and four pounds will last a man a day. When the men of the village went on a trading journey, or into the forest to gather palm nuts or to cut wood, they always took with them a supply of kwanga. The women had been busy making some that very day, for there was to be an expedition down the river which would start the following morning. This was why the rat, in his corner of the granary, had been left to nibble and to gnaw undisturbed.

While the cat enjoyed her well-earned supper, Nkunda sidled up to the Alo Man. She had been thinking that perhaps it was as important to keep the rats out of the grain as to keep the leopards away from the goat pen.

“Is there a story about the cat?” she asked. “She knew that the rat was stealing our grain when no one else did.”

“There is certainly a story about her,” said the Alo Man. Then he told the story which explains why the Cat and the Rat are enemies.

I often think [said the Alo Man] of the time, very long ago, when the Cat and the Rat were friends and lived together on an island. It was so long ago that they have both forgotten it, but they led a very happy life. There were birds in the trees for the Cat to eat, and there were nuts and manioc roots for the Rat to eat.

But nobody was ever so happy as not to want something more. One day the Rat said, "I am tired of living on this island. Let us go and find a village to live in. There you can have food without catching birds, and I can have food without digging in the ground."

"That will be delightful," said the Cat.
"But how are we to cross this great water?"

"Nothing is more easy," said the Rat. "We will carve a boat from the root of a manioc."

Then the Cat and the Rat dug up a large manioc root and began making it into a boat.

The Rat gnawed and gnawed and gnawed with his sharp teeth, until he had made a hollow large enough to hold the two friends. While he was busy at this, the Cat scratched and scratched and scratched, to make the outside of the boat smooth and to scrape off all the earth that clung to the great root.

[“Look! look!” cried Nkunda, laughing, for her cat was standing on two legs, scratching at a tree, just as if she wanted to show what cat-claws can do.]

Then the Cat and the Rat [went on the Alo Man] made two little paddles and started out in their boat.

It was much farther across the great water than it had looked from their island. Also they had forgotten to put any food into the boat. Presently the Cat began to say “Caungu! Caungu!” which means “I am hungry! I am hungry!”

And the Rat said “Quee! Quee!” which means in his language “I am hungry! I am hungry!”

But that did not do any good. They grew hungrier and hungrier. At last the Cat said “Caungu! Caungu!” very faintly, and curled herself up to sleep. And the Rat said “Quee! Quee!” very faintly, and curled himself up also, at the other end of the boat.

[When the Alo Man made the Cat and Rat noises, the listeners made them too, and there was a great deal of laughing. Nkunda’s own cat was cuddled up in the little girl’s arms, her yellow eyes shining like two little moons, and

she seemed to know that this was her very own story.]

But while the Cat slept, the Rat stayed awake and thought. Suddenly he remembered that the boat itself was made of manioc. He had eaten so much while he was gnawing out the hollow that he had not wanted any more for some time, but now he said, "Good! I will eat a little more and make the hollow deeper."

So he began — nibble, nibble, nibble!

"What is that noise?" exclaimed the Cat, waking at the sound.

But the Rat had shut his eyes and made himself as if he were fast asleep.

"I must have been dreaming," said the Cat, and she laid her head down on her paws and went to sleep again.

The Rat began again — nibble, nibble, nibble!

"What is that noise?" cried the Cat, waking up.

But the Rat made himself seem to be fast asleep.



“What strange dreams I have,” said the Cat, as she curled herself up and went to sleep again.

Once more the Rat began to nibble very fast, and the noise awoke the Cat.

“What is that noise?” asked the Cat.

But the Rat made believe to be sound asleep.

“My dreams are certainly very troublesome,” said the Cat, as she curled herself up and went to sleep once more with her paw folded over her eyes.

Then the Rat began nibbling again, and this time he gnawed a hole right through the bottom of the boat, and the water began to come in.

“What is this?” cried the Cat, jumping up quickly.

“Quee, quee, quee!” squealed the Rat, perching on one end of the boat.

“Caungu! Caungu!” miaued the Cat, climbing up on the other end, for she did not like the water at all.

“Quee, quee!”

“Caungu! Ca-ungu-u-u!”

“Quee, quee!”

“You did this, you wicked creature!” squalled the Cat.

“I was so hungry!” squeaked the Rat, and then the boat began to sink, and there was no

time for any more talk. They had to swim for their lives.

“I am going to eat you,” said the Cat, glaring at the Rat as they swam.

“I deserve it,” squeaked the Rat; “but don’t eat me now or you will be choked by the water. Wait until we reach the shore.”

“I will wait,” said the Cat, “but when we reach the shore I will certainly eat you.”

At last they reached the dry land.

“Now,” said the Cat, “I will eat you.”

“I deserve it,” said the Rat, “but I am too wet to be good eating now. Let me dry myself, while you dry your own beautiful coat. I shall be ready when you are.”

They sat down and began to dry their coats. [Nkunda’s cat was licking her breast and her coal-black paws and the fur of her striped and mottled gray back with all the care in the world.] And the Cat [went on the Alo Man] was so interested in making her beautiful coat quite smooth and glossy that she did not see that the Rat was busily digging a hole in the earth behind her.

“Are you ready?” asked the Cat at last, when every part of her coat was dry and glossy and smooth.

“Certainly,” said the Rat, and he disappeared into the hole.

“You rascal!” cried the Cat, for the hole was only just big enough for the Rat to dive into it.

“Quee, quee!” said the Rat from the bottom of the hole.

“You will never get out of that hole alive,” said the Cat. “I will stay here and wait for you, and when you come out I will eat you.”

“What if I never come out?” said the Rat. “Quee, quee!”

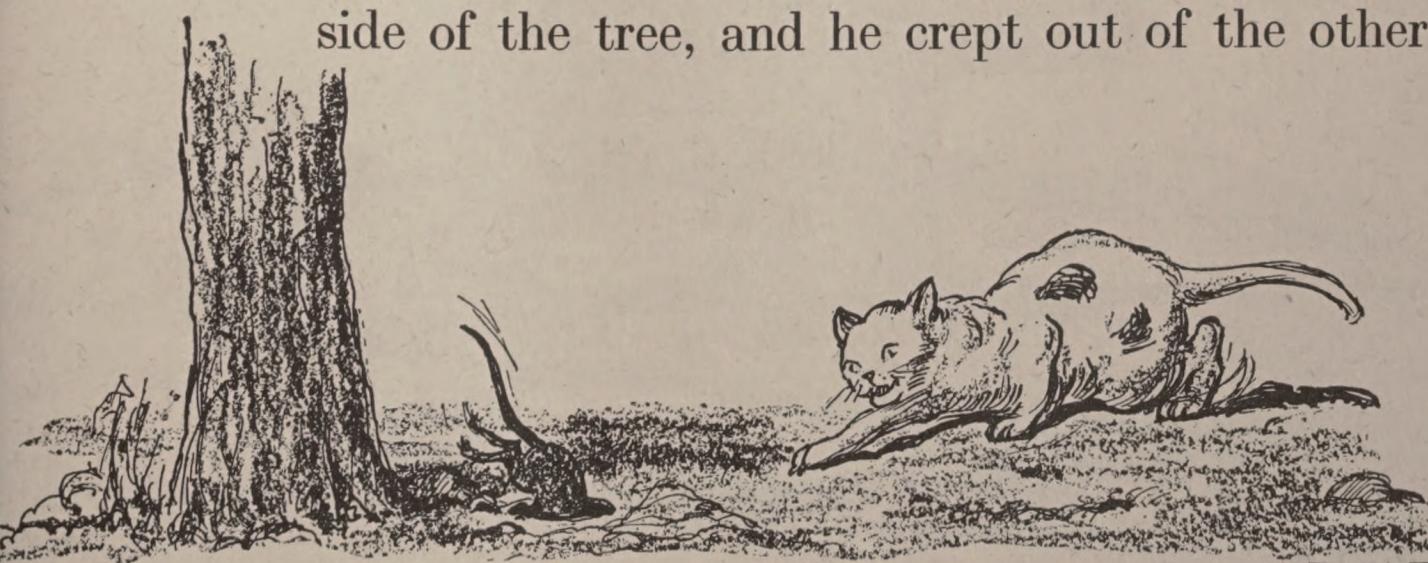
“Then you can stay in that hole and starve,” said the Cat, and she settled down in front of the hole with her nose on her paws and all four feet under her, watching for the Rat to come out.

“Quee, quee!” said the Rat, in the hole, and he began to dig himself in deeper.

All day long the Rat went on digging.

All day long the Cat watched beside the hole.

When night came, the Rat had dug down under a tree root and had come up on the other side of the tree, and he crept out of the other



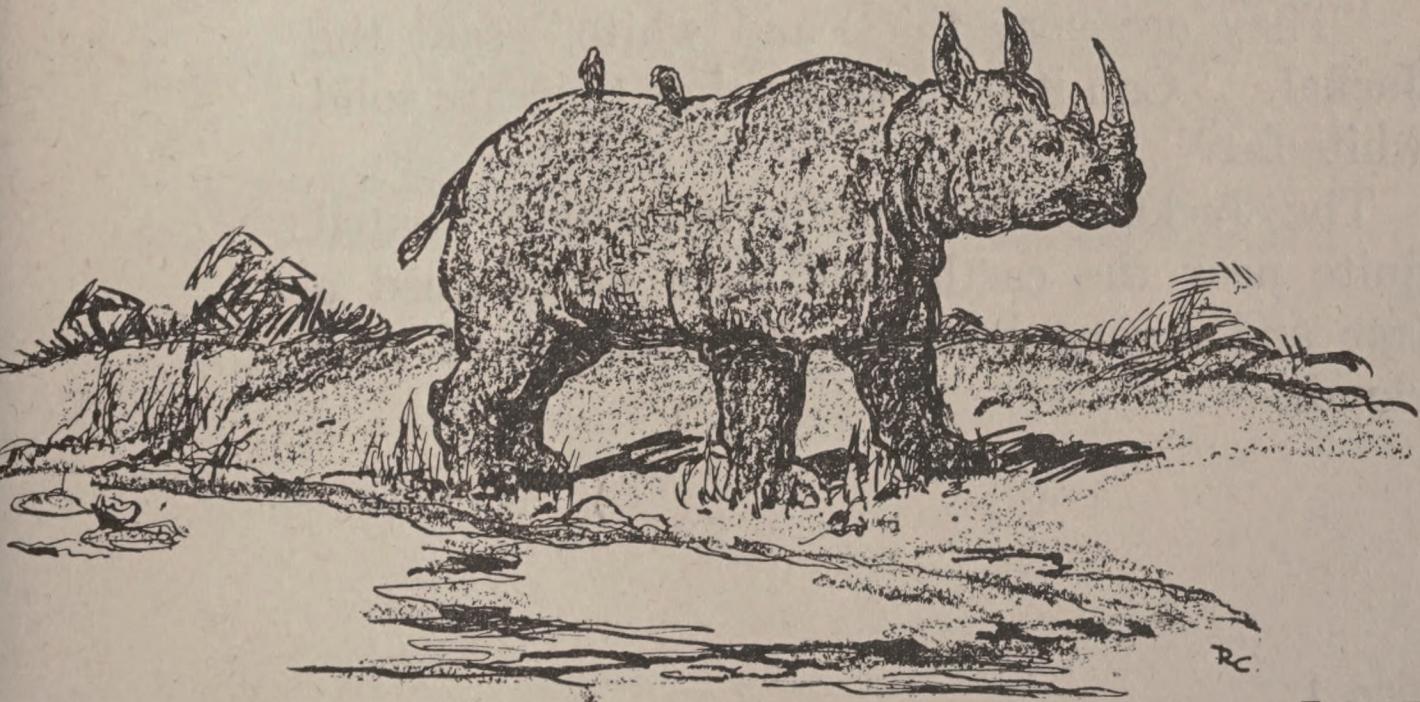
end of his tunnel and went on to the village, while the Cat still watched at her end.

From that day to this the Cat is never so fast asleep that she does not hear the gnawing of a Rat, and she is never tired of watching for the Rat to come out of a hole. And from that day to this the Rat knows that if there is a Cat in the village where he goes to steal grain, he will find the Cat waiting for him at one end or the other of his hole in the ground.

CHAPTER V

THE JACKAL AND HIS TRACKS

THERE seemed to be no animal in the forest or the swamp or on the plain about which the Alo Man did not know a story. In the nine hundred thousand miles of country, more or less, through which the Congo and its branches flow, there is land suitable for almost every kind of wild creature known to Africa. Elephants, buffalo, wild cattle, rhinoceros, antelope, koodoo, eland, giraffes, pigs, and other grazing and browsing animals wander over the grassy table-lands. Hippopotami, crocodiles, and other water creatures live in the rivers and swamps, and among the beasts of prey are lions, leopards, hyenas, and jackals, although the jackal is not much to be feared. Monkeys large and small



are numerous in the forests, and in a part of the forest so old and deep that the people call it the Plantations of God, the gorilla is sometimes found. In the Alo Man's stories, however, the smaller animals almost always had the best of it. They also had much more to say for themselves at night. As the old people put it, it is not always the biggest man whose words come in crowds.

“Do you know the reason why the hyena's legs are not alike?” asked the Alo Man one night after supper, when there was a great to-do out in the darkness.

No one did, and of course every one wanted to hear the story of the Hyena and the Jackal.

I often recall [began the Alo Man] the days when the animals could talk and the Hyena and the Jackal lived in the same village. One day they were looking up at the clouds.

“They are very thick and white,” said the Jackal. “Can it be possible that they are solid white fat?”

The Jackal waited until one cloud floated quite near the earth, and then he climbed a tree and sprang into the very middle of that cloud.



[That the Jackal should climb a tree did not seem strange to any of the listeners when the Alo Man told the story; all of them had seen a man climb a palm tree for nuts by looping two ropes around the trunk and putting his feet in one and the other by turns, walking up the trunk to the very top.]

“I was right,” said the Jackal; “it is the most delicious white fat.”

Then he ate and ate, until he was so full that he was afraid to try to climb down the tree.

“I am coming down!” cried the Jackal to the Hyena. “Catch me as I fall, or I shall be hurt.”

The Hyena planted her feet firmly in the earth and arched her back, and when the Jackal jumped he landed on her back unhurt.

“Thank you,” said he, but he was not really grateful at all. He was already planning to play a joke on the Hyena.

“Climb up on the cloud and eat some of the good white fat,” said he. “It is the finest food I have ever eaten in my life.”

The Hyena was glad to hear that the Jackal had left some for her, and she climbed the tree and jumped out upon the cloud and began to eat. She ate and ate, as the Jackal had done,

until she was so full that she did not dare to try to climb down the tree.

“I am coming down! Catch me!” she called to the Jackal, and he planted his four feet firmly in the ground and stood under the cloud. But as she jumped he stepped back, and down came the Hyena on her hind legs. So far and so hard did she fall that her hind legs were driven into her body, and have ever since been shorter than her fore legs, as you may see to this day.

But the Jackal’s turn came in time, for no dog is top dog in every fight. This is what happened to him.

One day the sun came down into the forest and sat down on the soft green earth, to rest. The Jackal came by and saw the sun resting there, and his eyes were dazzled so that he thought it was a goat. Now a goat would make him a fine dinner, so he pounced upon it quickly and put it in a sack and threw the sack over his shoulders to carry home.

He had not traveled far when the sun began to burn his shoulders.

“Oh! oh! oh!” cried the Jackal, trying to throw the sun off his shoulders. “Get down! get down!”

But the sun would not get down until he was

quite ready, and the Jackal's back was scorched in a long black stripe which he wears to this day.

When the Hyena saw the long black stripe she howled with delight, and ever since then, when the Hyena and the Jackal meet and the Hyena sees the stripe on the Jackal's back, the Hyena laughs and the Jackal yelps, just as you hear them doing now [concluded the Alo Man].

The Hyena and the Jackal were certainly making an uncommon racket even for them, and then, quite suddenly, they stopped.

"The Jackal must have been at his old tricks again," said the Alo Man. "It sounds as if he still remembered what he did in the time of the great drought."

"Tell about it," begged the girls.

"Yes, tell about it; that is a good story," said Mpoko. He had heard it before.

In this forest region the air was so hot and moist that such a thing as a drought was almost unknown, but the people all knew what it was like. Here the hot air took up the moisture from the swamps and rivers, and the sun could hardly get through the thick leaves of the forest. But out on the plains, where there were

few trees, the sun beat down with a fierce heat and the winds blew with a dry, hot fury that made every water pool precious to man and beast for miles around. Rivers that were deep and swift in the rainy season dried up completely in the dry season, and there were no villages on the wide table-lands, because there was no water there for months at a time. A few people wandered about who lived as they could by hunting, and the river villages, in which families lived in houses and kept goats, fowls, and cattle, had nothing to do with these wild savages.

It was a drought such as the people of the plains knew in the dry season that the Alo Man meant when he began to tell the story of the Jackal and the Drought.

I often remember [he said] the very dry time in the land when many animals died of thirst. It was in the days when the animals lived in villages and talked one with another, and when the drought was over the Lion called the animals together and said that some plan must be found to keep this from ever happening again.

The Ape said that they might go to some

country where there were no droughts, but the Tortoise said that he would never live to complete such a long journey.

“Let us sleep through the next dry season,” said the Snake.

“That would never suit me,” said the Hare.

At last, after a great deal of discussion, the Jackal and the Hyena suggested that they might all join in digging a great pool to hold water through the next dry season.

This seemed a wise plan, and on the very next day the animals came to dig the hole.

They agreed to take turns. It was settled that as the Hyena and the Jackal had made the plan, the Hyena should be first and the Jackal last; but when the Jackal’s turn came he was nowhere to be found. The pool was almost finished, and the others decided to go on and get it done without him. Soon the rain began to fall, and filled it full of pure, sweet water. Then a rule was made that no one except those who had helped to dig the pool should be allowed to drink there.

The Jackal was hiding in the bushes and heard all that was said, and he came very early the next morning and drank all that he wanted. Every morning, before any one else was about

he did this, and after a while he grew bolder and took a swim in the pool, so that the water was muddy when the others came to drink.

“Who did this?” asked the Lion.

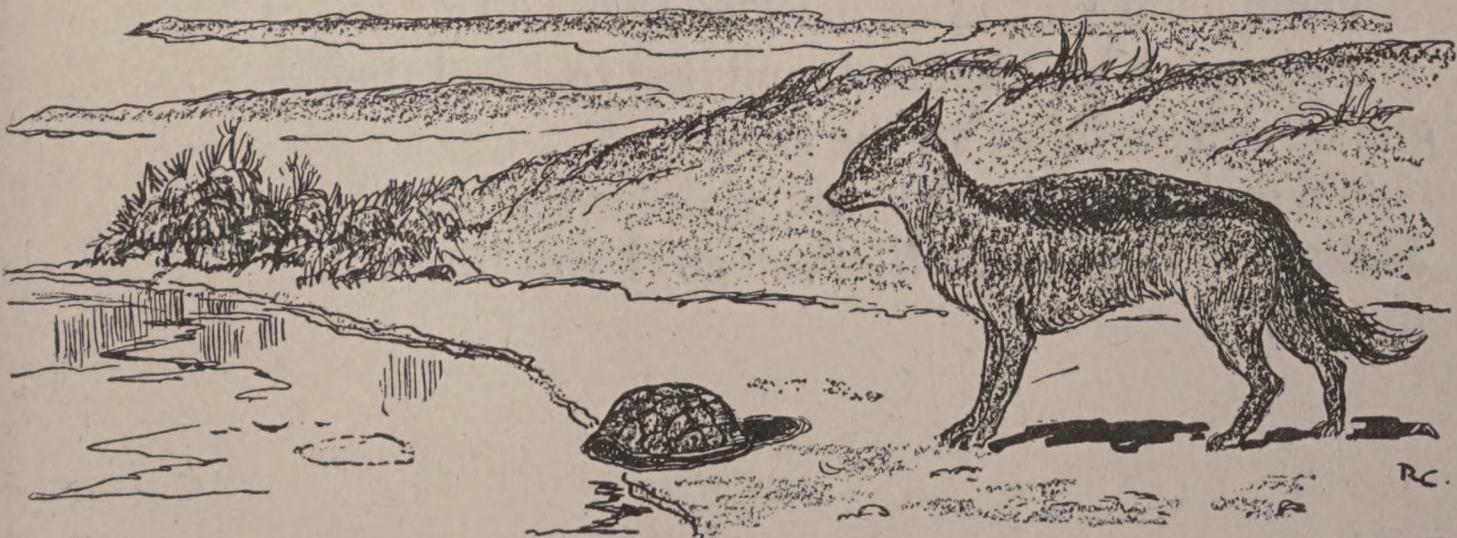
“Who did this?” asked the Leopard.

“Who did this?” asked all the other animals when they came to drink.

But no one knew.

“I will tell you what we can do,” said the Tortoise. “Cover my shell with beeswax to make it sticky, and I will watch all night by the pool and catch the rascal.”

So the shell of the Tortoise was covered with a thick coat of sticky wax, and he took his place beside the pool to watch for trespassers. He drew his head and his tail and his feet inside his shell, so that he looked like a flat brown stone. From time to time he would stick his head out cautiously to see if any one was coming. After waiting all night long, he heard a noise in the bushes. He crept down to the very edge of the



water, drew his head and feet into his shell, and kept as still as a stone.

Then the Jackal came sneaking down to the pool, looking from side to side to make sure that no one was set to guard it.

“What a very convenient stepping-stone,” he said, and he placed his two fore feet upon the Tortoise’s shell and bent down to drink. No sooner had he done this than he discovered, to his great surprise and terror, that his feet were stuck fast.

“Ow! Ow! Let me go! This is a mean trick!” howled the Jackal.

“You are not the only one who knows how to play tricks,” said the Tortoise, and he began to move away.

“Yah! Yah! Let me go!” yelled the Jackal. “If you don’t let me go, I will kick your shell to pieces with my hind feet.”

“You may do just as you please about that,” said the Tortoise, moving on away from the pool.

The Jackal kicked as hard as he could at the Tortoise with his hind feet, and first one and then the other stuck fast to the shell.

“Wow! Wow! Let me go!” squalled the Jackal. “If you don’t let me go, I will bite you in two!”

“Try it and see what happens,” said the Tortoise quietly, moving on along the path.

The Jackal bit the shell as hard as he could, and his jaws stuck to it fast. He was dragged along, until, after some time, the Tortoise arrived at the Lion’s house and told how he had caught the thieving Jackal.

All the animals, when they heard the news, gathered to see the Jackal in his miserable captivity, but not one of them had any pity for him. Every one said that he ought to die for his dishonesty and his mischief-making.

“You may live until tomorrow,” said the Lion, “and we will allow you this favor: you may choose the way you will die.”

“Thank you,” said the Jackal, meekly. Then he began to think whether there was not some plan by which he might escape even now.

All the animals came to see the Jackal executed, and the Hyena was made the executioner.

“Have you made up your mind in what way you wish to be killed?” asked the Lion.

“I once saw a monkey kill a rat,” said the Jackal, “by swinging it round by the tail and dashing it against a tree. I think I should prefer to be killed in that way.”

“Very well,” said the Lion, “the Hyena will

take you by the tail and swing you round and round and dash you against a tree."

"Thank you," said the Jackal, meekly. "If I might be so free as to make a suggestion, permit me to say that the other animals might be safer if they sat as far away as possible. Otherwise, when the Hyena lets go of me, I might hit one of them instead of the tree, and that would be very unfortunate."

The animals thought that this was a good suggestion, and went as far away as they could go without being out of sight of the execution.

Now the Jackal had saved some fat from the meat they gave him for his dinner, and he had greased his tail all the way to the tip, so that it was as slippery as a lump of butter.

The Hyena grasped the Jackal firmly by the tail and began to swing him round his head with all his might, but the harder he swung the more quickly the tail slipped out of his hand. In spite of all he could do, the Hyena could not keep hold of the slippery tail, and before he knew what had happened, the Jackal had landed on the ground and was running away through the forest for dear life. As for the Hyena, he lost his grip so suddenly that he was upset entirely, and sat down hard against a tree.

And as for the other animals, they were so surprised that not one of them started to run after the Jackal until he was out of sight.

The Jackal never came back to disturb the waters of the pool. A long time after every one who had helped to build it was dead, it was still known to all the animals of the forest, and it never was dry even in the hottest weather. But the Tortoises never forgot how the Jackal came to steal the water from the pool, and if you were to go there now you would probably find one of them on the bank, watching to see that no one troubles the waters.

“Did you find that one there?” asked Mpoko.

“Yes,” said the Alo Man, rubbing the last bit of red clay into some curious marks on the shell of the little tortoise he had been decorating. “I found him by a pool where all the animals drink, looking exactly like a little brown stone in the mud.”

CHAPTER VI

WHY THE CANOE UPSET

THE mist of the river still hung in the air in the gray morning light. Early as it was, the men of the village were astir, making ready for their expedition. Mpoko and Nkula, rubbing their eyes, made a hasty breakfast and scampered down to the river bank with their fishing tackle.

The boys had two new scoop nets, which Nkunda had helped to make. Like all the children of the village, they could do all sorts of things with fiber string, and could even make the string. Hibiscus fiber, braided palm leaves, thongs, and bark, all were used for string, thread, or cord as each happened to be wanted. Strands of fiber were made into string by rolling with the hand, on the thigh. Mpoko and Nkunda and Nkula, and even their younger playmates, could make any number of cat's cradles. One looked like a locust, another like a grass hut with four sides and a pointed top; and another was called "The Bed." The Alo Man had taught them one named for the great zigzag valley of the Zambezi — the Batoka Gorge, below the Victoria Falls, which are three times as high as

Niagara. The Alo Man could also make the Moon figure, the Moon darkened, the Fighting Lions and the Parrot Cage; and the boys knew figures called the Fish Trap, the Pit, and the Calabash Net.

Mpoko knew exactly how he should go about his fishing, although he had never fished in the part of the river where he and Nkula were going that morning. He was always the leader in their sports, and as they squatted on the end of a canoe waiting for the men to come, he explained his plan all over again. They would fish in two ways. First, they would look for a pool or backwater where the current was not as strong as it was in mid-channel. In the water, but near the bank, they would build little lattice-work fences, about eighteen inches apart. Then they would take the larger of their nets and find some rocks on which to stand while they dipped the net into the water with the mouth upstream. Fish swimming downstream would swim into the net and be caught. Then the boys would lift the net out and lay the fish on the rocks to dry. There were said to be plenty of little fish something like whitebait in that part of the river, and if they had good luck, there would be fresh fish for supper.

When they were tired of this way of fishing, they would take the smaller nets and go back to the pool where they had built their fences, and here they might find some small fish that had come in between the fences and could not find their way out. The small nets would scoop up these little fish quite easily.

Mpoko knew as well as any one that it is not very wise to count your fish while they are still in the river, but he could not help making a guess at the number they might get in a whole day's fishing. The men heard him and grinned as they started to push off the canoes.

The boats were heavy, but they rode well in the water. They were worked by means of paddles, and each was made of a single tree trunk hollowed out. The people of this thatch-roofed village had no knowledge of carpenter work. Whatever they made of wood was cut out of the solid block with their adzes. In this way they would chisel out a log until a good-sized hollow had been formed; then hot stones were placed in it to burn out a deeper hole. When the stones cooled, they were heated again to be put back after the charred wood was scraped away; this was done over and over, until the canoe was deep enough to be seaworthy.

Sometimes the ends were carved to look like the head of some animal. The paddles also were sometimes decorated with chip-carving. The African dugout is not so graceful as the birch canoe, but it has some advantages of its own. The Congo is a peculiar river.

One reason why so much of Africa is still wild country, some of it not even explored, is that there are so many falls in the rivers. Boats cannot go up from the sea to the interior unless they are light enough to be carried round the falls. And boats that are small enough for this are too small to be of much use in carrying goods for trading or large parties of settlers. Another reason is that so much of the country is either dense jungle or waterless plain. Almost the only way to carry goods into the Upper Congo country is by porters, who have to follow narrow trails, in single file.



Where such a trail crosses a river too deep to ford, — and in flood time African rivers are likely to be deep, — of course there must be a bridge. The wild people are clever at making woven bridges. To be sure, these bridges are not wide enough for horses or wagons, but there are no horses or wagons to go over them, so that makes no difference. Travelers pay something for the privilege of using such a bridge, while the men of the country near by keep it in order. It was to repair a bridge that the men of Mpoko's village were going downstream now.

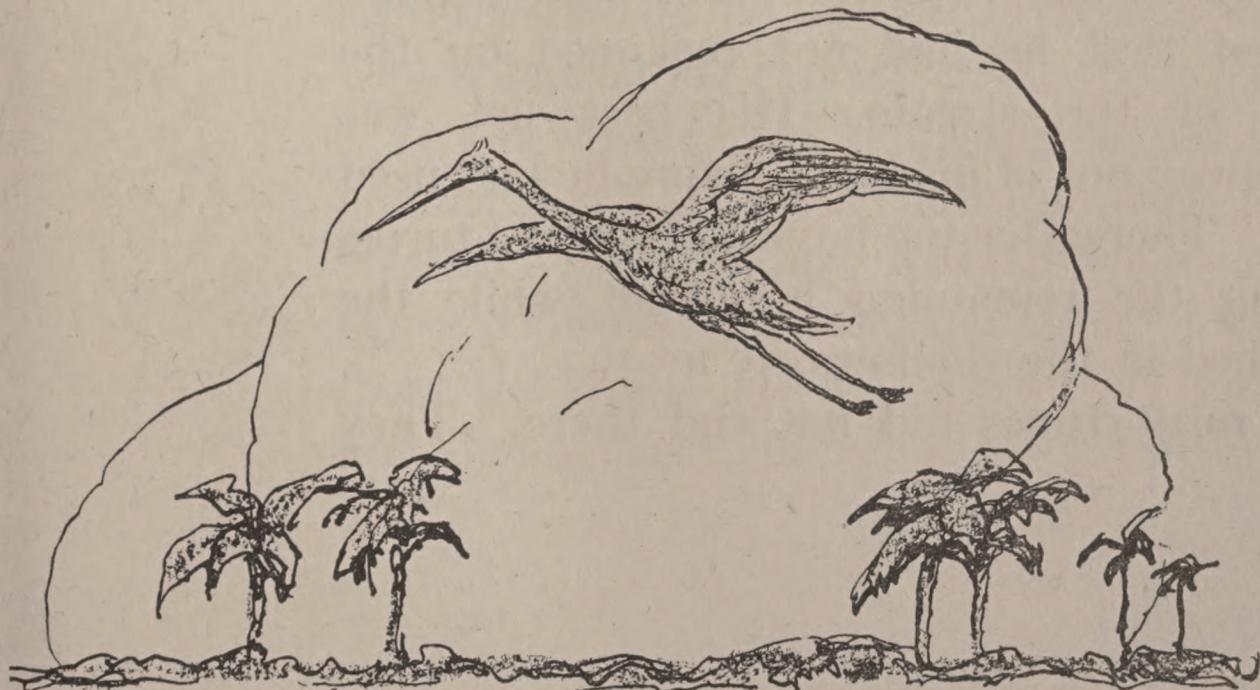
The canoes shot swiftly down with the current. The two boys, with their keen black eyes, saw all sorts of interesting things by the way. Once they disturbed a hippopotamus having one of his daily baths. His great mouth looked as if he could swallow them whole, but he was much more scared than they were. Once the strange, whiskered, black and white face of a colobus monkey peered out of a tree top. Then a crowned crane, his feathered crest very erect, rose out of the swamp and flapped away, his long legs trailing behind him. Even as early as this the sun was blazing hot as a furnace and the mist had burned quite away.

There was no need to paddle; the men had

all they could do to steer the canoes as they rode on the strong current. At last they shot round a bend of the river and into the shadow of the bridge and scrambled ashore.

The bridge was made of saplings firmly lashed together and had a handrail of rattan. It hung from the great trees on the two sides of the river, high above even the reach of a flood. A log bridge might have been swept away by the caving of the banks in flood time, and the people could not possibly have built a stone bridge or an iron one.

When the traders were coming back from their last journey, they had noticed that the supports of the bridge were rather shaky, and as they meant to send a much larger caravan over it before long, they wanted to make sure that all was in order.



Over narrow streams, bridges are sometimes made of a bundle of slim tree trunks lashed together and resting on the banks, but here the river was too wide for that. Farther down, the banks of the Lower Congo are steep hills, a mile and a quarter apart, and through this funnel-like channel the Upper Congo and its tributary streams pour their waters into a tremendous whirlpool known as the Devil's Cook Pot. None of the men of the village had ever seen this awful place, but they had heard of it, and many were the tales told of the dangers of the unknown waters toward which their river flowed through the wilderness.

While the men worked at the lashings of the timbers and the closer knotting of the ropes, the boys went about their fishing. They did not have much trouble in finding a suitable shallow place for their little wicker fences, but when they came to fish with the scoop net, Mpoko discovered that he had not reckoned on the strength of the stream. His best net was whirled away out of his hand before he had used it twice. Thereafter the boys had to take turns, one using the remaining large net while the other fished in the shallows.

Their misfortunes did not end there. They

had just gathered all their little fishes into a woven basket, when Nkula darted back from the river with a startled shout, and Mpoko turned just in time to see net, fish, and all vanish into the long, wicked jaws of a crocodile.

The boys were in luck, as one of the men told them, not to have gone into the crocodile's stomach themselves. All the same, they felt very cheap to be going home with only a few mean little fish for the whole day's work.

The bridge had now been put in order, and as the party took boat again for home, several crocodile stories were told. Every one of the men had had some experience with the Terror of the Waters. They all knew how he would lie for hours in the mud with only his nose in sight, looking exactly like a fallen log, and how his hoarse call could sometimes be heard in the swamp through the whole night. The boys felt secretly glad to be on the way home in a solid, well-balanced log canoe.

It was slower work returning than it had been coming down the river, and the paddles worked steadily. When they had traveled some distance, a hunter from another village hailed them from the trail. He had a wild pig that he did not wish to carry home and after a little bargain-

ing the bridge menders paid for it and it was tumbled into the canoe. As one of the men said slyly, roast pork for supper would do very well, seeing that the boys had not caught enough fish to make a showing!

At home, in the village, the women had come in and were at work as usual preparing supper. A little before sunset, far down the river, the voices of men singing came over the water, and as the song grew louder they could make out something about roast pig for supper.

“They must have killed something,” said Nkunda.

“The boys have had bad luck with their fishing,” said the Alo Man, whose keen ears had caught the little jeering note in the song.

In another minute the canoes would come in sight round the bend in the river, when — all at once — there was a great splash and a chorus of yells, and the song broke off in the middle of a line. When the canoes presently appeared, the men were no longer singing; they were paddling with all their might, and they looked rather scared and crestfallen.

Mpoko and Nkula, however, did not look crestfallen. They grinned as only small African boys can grin, as they hopped out of the canoe



and scampered for the huts with their few but precious fish.

“Where is that roast pork we were going to have for supper?” asked the Alo Man, coming to meet the party.

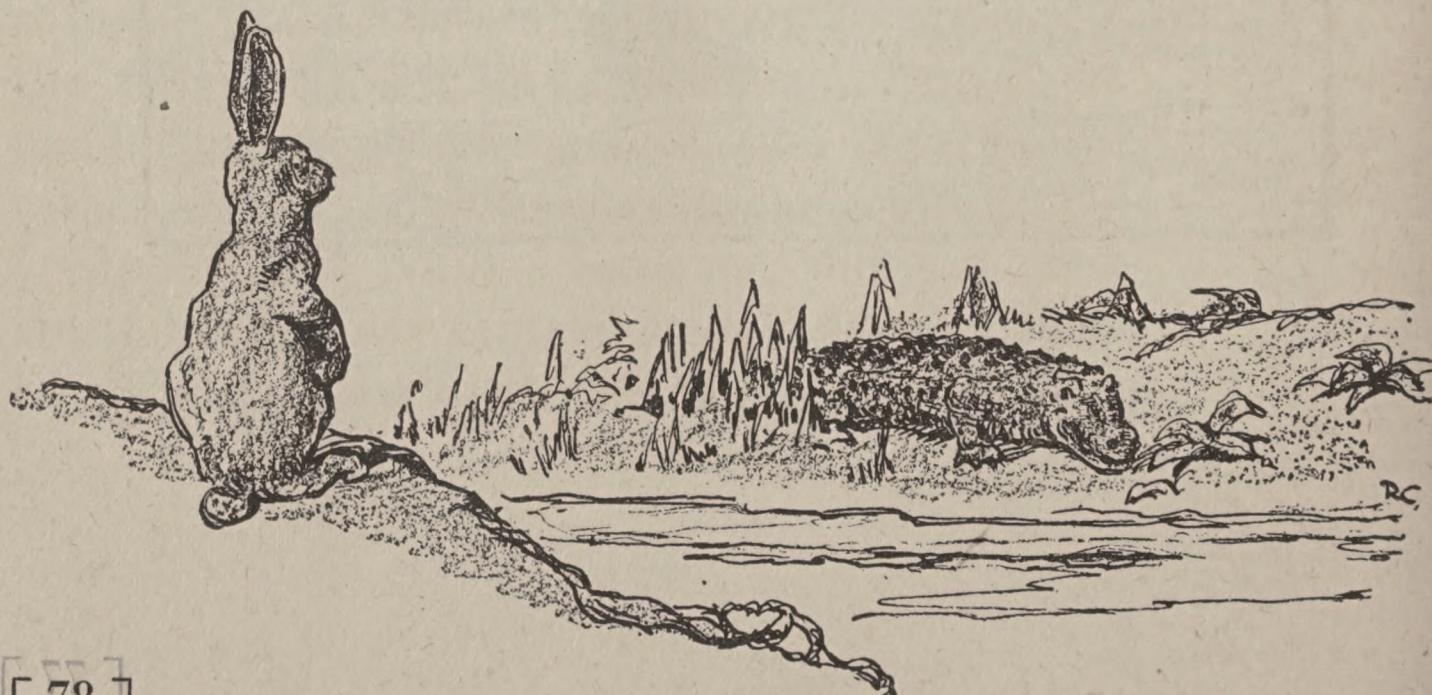
“We were nearly home when a crocodile rose up almost under the canoe, snapped at the pig, tipped us over, and went off with the meat,” growled one of the men.

Thus, after all, there would not have been nearly so good a supper that night if the boys had not gone fishing.

Crocodile stories were naturally in order after supper, and the Alo Man, when his turn came, told the story of the Rabbit and the Crocodile.

I always like to tell of the time, long and long ago, when the creatures lived in towns like people, and had their own farms.

The Crocodile had a farm by the river, and



he used to come up on land when he liked. One day, as he lay sunning himself on his farm, the Rabbit saw him.

“How do you do, Uncle?” said the Rabbit, edging up toward him. “You seem to be taking life easy. All you have to do is to sleep, and eat, and bathe, and enjoy yourself.”

“Let me alone,” grunted the Crocodile, who was sleepy. And he shut his eyes.

Close to the Crocodile’s nose there grew a nice juicy bunch of young plantains.

“How good those leaves do look!” thought the Rabbit. “And there they grow and flourish under the very nose of a creature who never eats them. I wonder if I could not get just one good bite, and then run?”

The Rabbit crept up closer and closer, but just as he was going to nibble at the leaves, the Crocodile woke up and yelled at him.

“Get away from here, you little thief!” he roared, and he snapped so savagely with his sharp, white, pointed teeth that the Rabbit ran faster than he had ever thought he possibly could run, and never stopped until he reached home.

He told his wife and children about the selfish old Crocodile, who was so full of dinner that he could not keep awake and who would not let a

hungry little Rabbit nibble the leaves that he did not want himself. When the little Rabbits heard why they had no supper that night, they had a great deal to say about the Crocodile.

“That is all very well,” said the Rabbit, “but when a chicken is the judge, the cockroach gets no justice. We cannot depend on any one else to punish the Crocodile; we must do it ourselves. Come all of you and get dry grass and leaves, and we will go and lay them in a circle around the Crocodile while he is asleep, and then we will set them on fire. We’ll give him a fine scare.”

Then all the Rabbits wriggled with joy and kicked up their heels at the thought of what was going to happen, and they gathered many armfuls of grass and leaves and laid them in a circle round the Crocodile. The fire was kindled, and it began to blaze up and smoke. The Rabbits hid themselves in the bushes and kept as still as stones.

Crackle — crackle — snap-snap-snap! went the fire, but the Crocodile did not wake up.

Snap! snap! snap! went the burning twigs, but the Crocodile did not wake up.

The smoke began to get thicker and blacker, until at last they could not see the Crocodile,

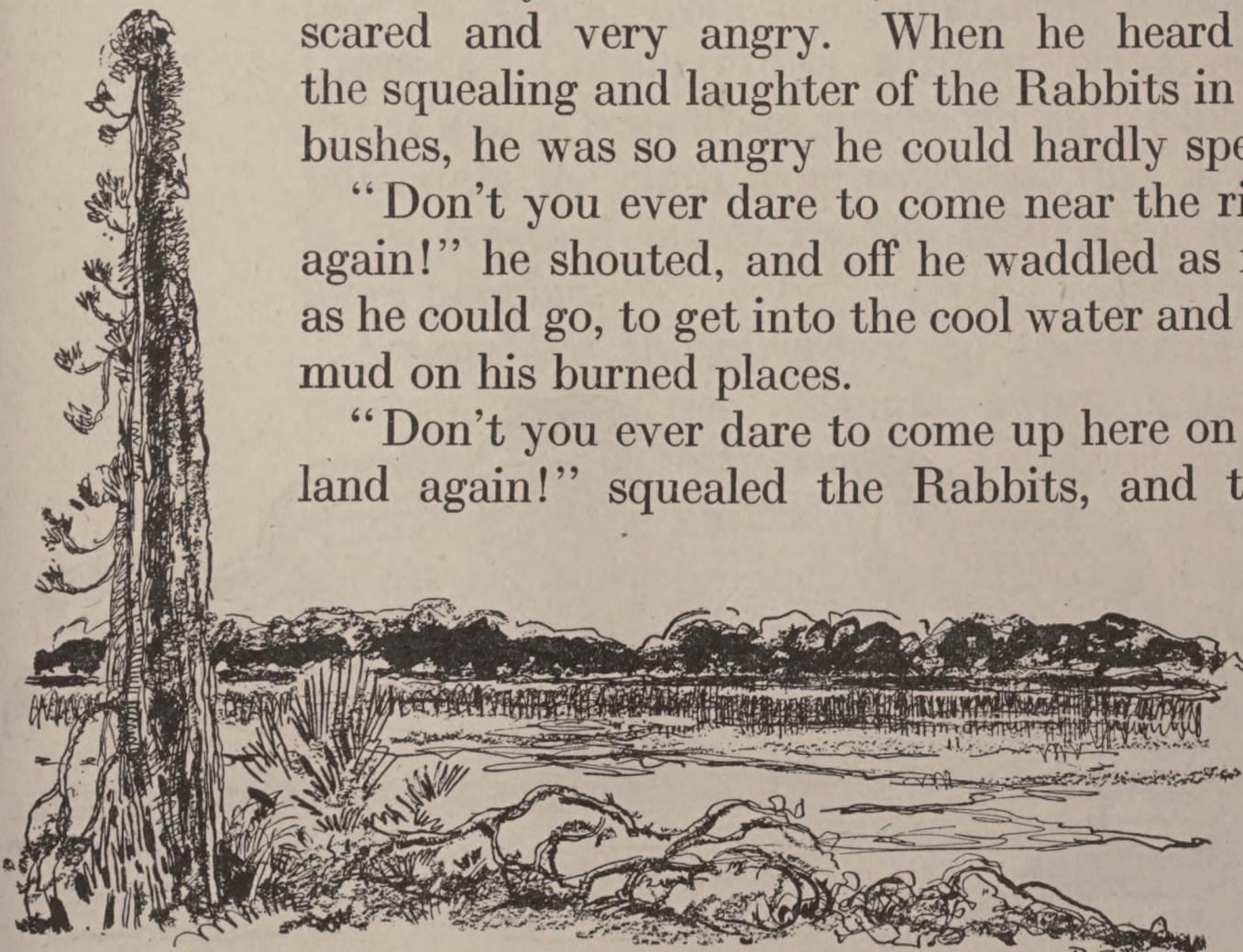
but they heard him cough in his sleep. Then he turned over, and coughed again.

“Haugh! Haugh! What’s the matter here? I can’t breathe!” grunted the Crocodile.

Then he choked, and coughed, and opened his mouth so wide that a live coal flew into it. At that he woke up completely. He made a rush to get away from the fire, but found it in front of him. He turned round, and saw it still in front of him, while at the same time it was behind him scorching the end of his tail. Then he made one big jump and got out of the circle of fire, and his hide was so thick that he was hardly burned at all, but he was badly scared and very angry. When he heard all the squealing and laughter of the Rabbits in the bushes, he was so angry he could hardly speak.

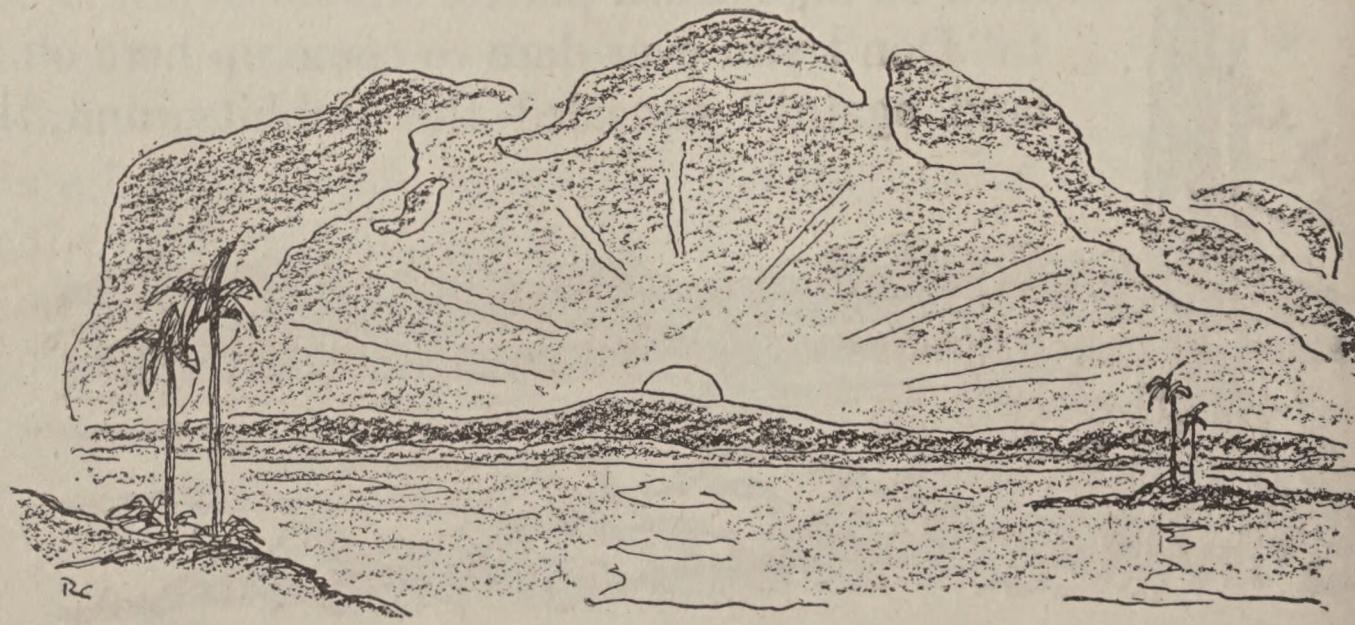
“Don’t you ever dare to come near the river again!” he shouted, and off he waddled as fast as he could go, to get into the cool water and put mud on his burned places.

“Don’t you ever dare to come up here on the land again!” squealed the Rabbits, and they



set about gathering the plantains and other vegetables on the Crocodile's farm where the fire had not come.

And from that day to this the Rabbits never go near the river if they can help it, and the Crocodile never goes far from the river if he can help it. He does not like to be reminded of the time when he was caught in the fire by a trick and the Rabbits laughed at him, for the news went from one tongue to another, and the Crocodile has never heard the last of it.



CHAPTER VII

THE TRAIL OF THE ELEPHANT

THE farms around the village were good to have, but the real storehouse of the people was the forest. The forests of the Congo form one of the largest tree-clad regions of the world. More rubber vines are found there than in any other place.

Yams, plantains, and pineapples grow wild in the forest. Coffee now grows wild in many parts of Africa, although it was not till 1876 that Scotch planters brought the first coffee tree to Africa, from the Edinburgh Botanical Gardens. Cotton grows without being cultivated and is sometimes woven on native looms; but lately the cloth from overseas, that is sold in twelve-yard pieces by the traders, is much more popular.

Among the things grown on the farms are cassava, maize, rice, peanuts, sweet potatoes, bananas, beans, sugar-cane, tobacco, coffee, according to the nature of the soil. Rubber is almost the only product that sells for a price which makes it worth while to carry it two days' journey to a market.

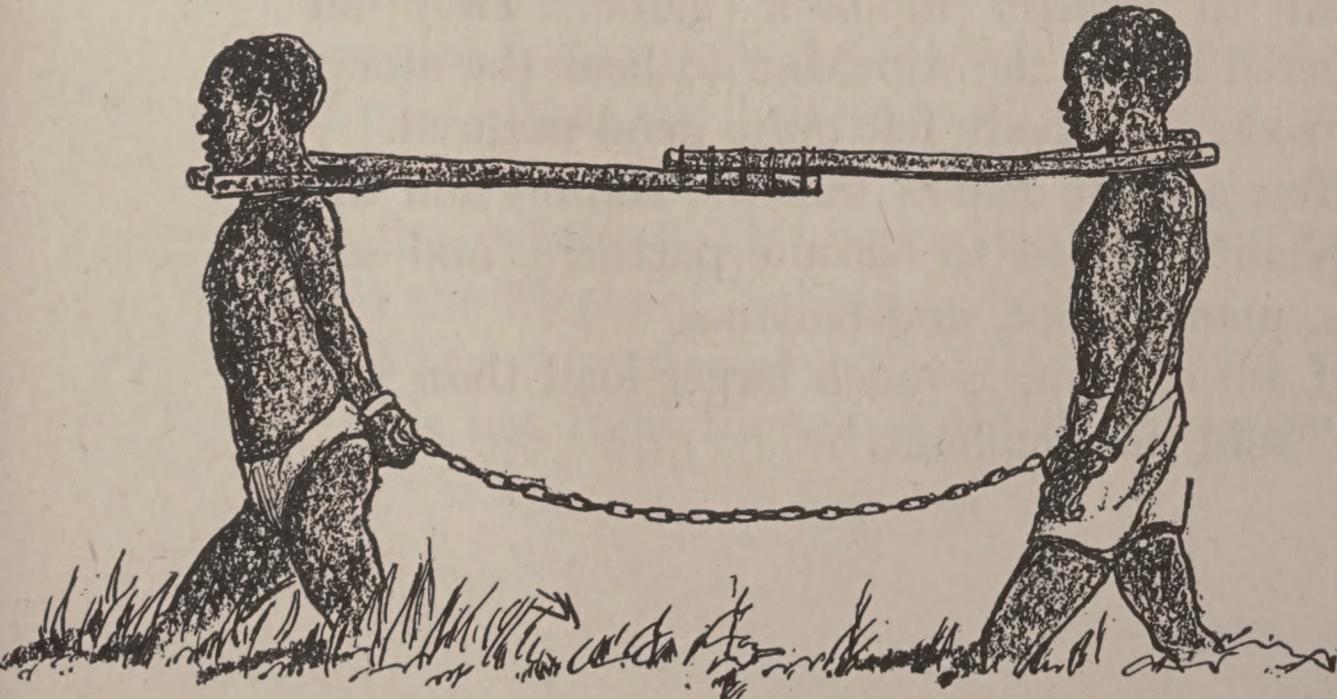
Ivory is in great demand by traders, but when an elephant is killed the ivory belongs to the king of the country. He has his workmen and artists make it into carved and ornamented articles. When the king dies, all this collection of carved ivory is destroyed; for this reason carved ivory that a trader can buy is rare in Equatorial Africa. Much uncarved ivory is also hoarded.

The people of Mpoko's village traded rubber, palm oil, and sometimes raffia. They were now getting ready for a great journey to the trading station far down the river. All the river villages would share in this expedition, and there would be perhaps one hundred and fifty men in all. One chief might go himself, with as many men as were needed to carry his goods; another would send a trusted man in charge of ten or fifteen porters; another might send his men with their loads in charge of a friend, and so on. So strong a company would be able to travel through the wilderness without much fear of wild beasts or of human enemies.

In a great part of wild Africa, slave-raiding has always gone on more or less, and the forest paths are never really safe. Mpoko and Nkunda had heard their mother tell of a little sister of her

own who was sent to the market four miles away to buy a saucepan, and on the way home, straying from the party with whom she went, had been lost and never again heard of. There were people they knew who had been slaves themselves, or had lost a mother, father, or friend in this way. A person carried off by the slave trader would never be able to get home again or to find people who talked his own language. There are no maps, no letters, no police, no common language in these wild places. A great shadow is over all the land, the shadow of constant danger.

All things considered, the beasts of the forest are less feared than human enemies. In all the Alo Man's stories, the animals behaved as they did in the old days when the world was new and there was order in the land. Each tribe had its king; the elephant, of course, was king of



the large animals; the largest of the eagles was king of the birds; a certain large fish was king of the fishes; and there was a king also of the locusts and one of the ants.

But for all that he was the king of the largest animals, the Elephant did not always get the better of the others, as is shown in the story of the Elephant and the Rabbit. The Alo Man had been watching the boys playing at trading; suddenly he began to tell the story.

The Rabbit said to the Elephant [the Alo Man began], "Let us go into partnership."

"But I am so much stronger than you," said the Elephant.

"And I am so much more nimble than you," said the Rabbit.

[The children began to laugh, for that was exactly how the boys had argued when they began to quarrel in their game. They all gathered about the Alo Man to hear the story, and soon everybody felt quite good-natured.]

After a great deal of talk the Rabbit and the Elephant decided to become partners, and sell nuts, manioc root, and bananas.

"I am carrying a much larger load than you are," said the Elephant.

“But I go so much faster than you do,” said the Rabbit, as he skipped along under his small load.

After a while they came to a river, and the Rabbit, who does not like to wet his feet, asked the Elephant to carry him across. The Elephant, however, said that he had a heavy enough load already, and he waded into the river.

“Oh, very well,” said the Rabbit, cheerfully, and finding a shallow place he hopped from one rock to another until he reached the far side.

When they came to the village, the people were glad to see the Rabbit, but they were afraid of the Elephant because he looked so cross.

“What will you give me for my nuts?” asked the Rabbit.

“We will give you these cowries,” said the people, and they took all his nuts. But they bought very little from the Elephant.

It was the same everywhere. The Elephant growled and grumbled, and rocked from one side to the other, and had very little success, while the Rabbit sold all his wares at good prices. In the end the Rabbit had a large bag of cowries and the Elephant had only a little one.

When they started home, the Elephant said: “It is not right for you to have the large bag

and for me to have the small one. If any one should ask you, say that the large bag is mine."

"Very well," said the Rabbit.

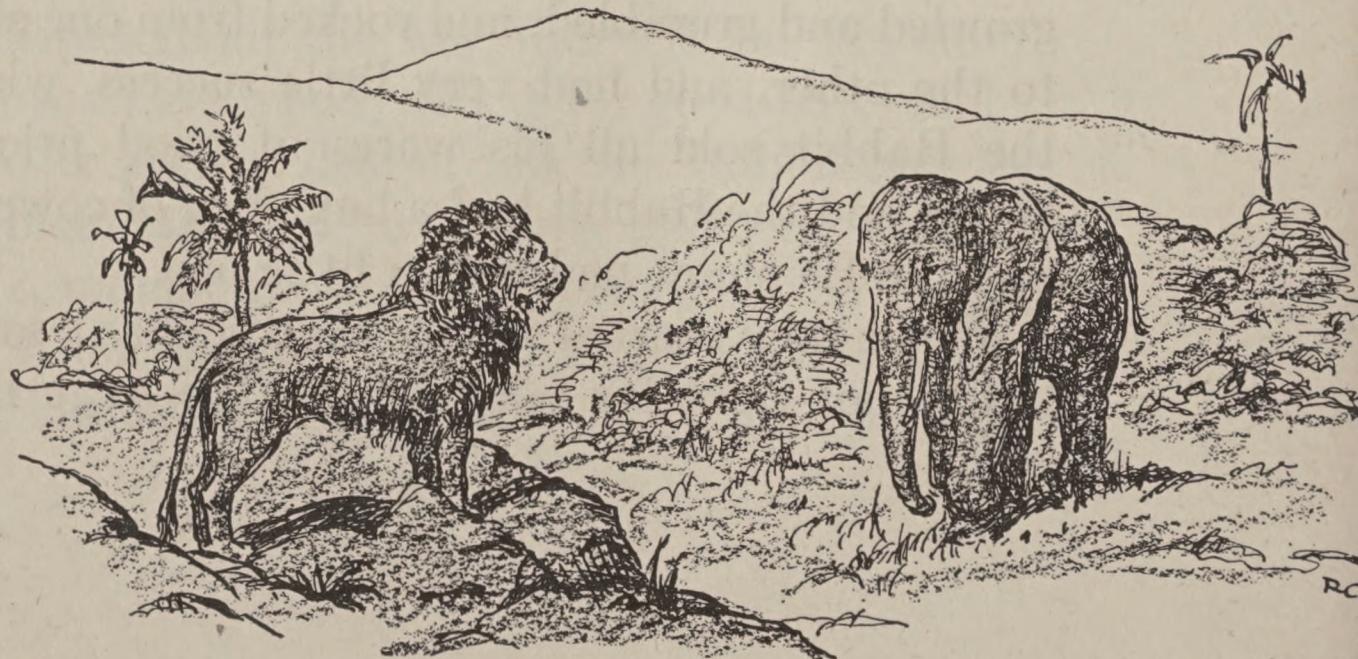
Soon they met some travelers, and when the travelers saw the two bags of cowries, they asked the Rabbit if the large one was his, and when he said it was, they laughed. After they had passed by the Elephant said, "I told you to say that the large bag was mine."

"Oh, yes, so you did," said the Rabbit. "I forgot."

The Elephant was growing more and more angry, and he said to himself, "What if I leave him to travel alone with his big bag of cowries? We shall see how long he will keep it."

At the next bend in the trail the Elephant turned aside into the forest. Soon he met a Lion, and said to him, "A Rabbit back there is traveling alone with a large bag of cowries."

"Good!" said the Lion. "I will eat that



Rabbit and carry off his treasure," and away he bounded through the forest.

Then the Elephant met a Buffalo, and said to him, "A silly little Rabbit back there has a large bag of cowries."

"That is very pleasant," said the Buffalo. "I will kill that Rabbit and steal his treasure," and off he trampled through the swamp.

Soon the Elephant met a Hyena, and said to him, "There is a foolish young Rabbit all alone back there with a great bag of cowries."

"How kind of you!" said the Hyena. "I will crack the bones of that Rabbit and get his treasure," and off he trotted across the plain.

Meanwhile the Lion and the Rabbit had met.

The Lion gave a great roar and was making ready to spring, when the Rabbit said gayly, "How have you slept, Uncle? I am going to the great feast that the King of the Monkeys is giving, and I shall buy good things with some of these cowries. Don't you want to come, too?"

The Lion thought that it would be much better to attend this feast than to eat a few mouthfuls of Rabbit; so he said, "Thank you, I shall be proud to go with you," and they trotted along together.

Then the Buffalo came crashing through the bushes with his horns lowered, but the Rabbit said gayly, "Have you slept well, Uncle? I am going to the great feast that the King of the Monkeys is giving, and I shall buy good things with some of these cowries. Don't you want to join us?"

The Buffalo thought that it would be much better to attend this feast than to gore the Rabbit; so he said, "Thank you, I shall be proud to go with you," and they all went on together.

Then the Hyena slunk out of the tall grass and showed his teeth, but the Rabbit said gayly, "I hope you have slept well, Uncle. I am going to the great feast that the King of the Monkeys is giving, and I shall buy good things with some of these cowries. Will you not come with us?"

The Hyena thought that it would be much better to attend this feast than to pick the bones of a small Rabbit; so he said, "Thank you, I shall be proud to go with you," and all four went on in company.

When they reached the forest where the King of the Monkeys lived, the Rabbit asked them to wait while he told the King who had come to

his feast. He found the King of the Monkeys, and told the whole story and asked for help.

When the other three animals came up, the King of the Monkeys welcomed them graciously, and said to the Lion, "The feast is ready except for certain small things. Will you do me the favor to find me a log with smooth bark? That is the only sort of wood that will roast the meat which we shall serve at this feast."

Off bounded the Lion to find a log with smooth bark.

"And you," he said to the Buffalo, "will you do me the favor of finding some young banana leaves that have fallen? Then we shall have suitable plates for the meat when it is cooked."

Off galloped the Buffalo to find some young leaves fallen from a banana tree.

"And you, Uncle," said the King to the Hyena, "will you do me the favor of finding a spring with spouting water? That is the only kind of water in which we can boil the vegetables."

Off ran the Hyena to find a spring of spouting water.

All night the three animals hunted and could not find what they had been sent to get, and in

the morning they came back very tired and humble.

“You do not seem to care to come to my feast,” said the King of the Monkeys, severely.

“I hunted all through the forest,” said the Lion, licking his paws.

“I sat under banana trees all night long,” said the Buffalo, shivering.

“I watched the mouth of the spring until the moon went down,” said the Hyena, yawning as if his jaws would break in two.

“You lazy fellows, I have heard enough of your excuses!” shouted the King of the Monkeys, and all the Monkeys, who had gathered above in the trees, began to throw down sticks and large nuts and to chatter so fiercely that the Lion, the Buffalo, and the Hyena started out of the forest at full speed and never came back. Then the King of the Monkeys and the little Rabbit laughed and laughed and laughed, until they were tired.

But sometimes, even now, when the Lion, the Buffalo, and the Hyena meet, they discuss the question whether there is any such thing as a log with smooth bark, or a banana tree whose leaves fall when they are just coming out, or a spring with spouting waters.

All the listeners laughed as loud and long as the Rabbit and the King of the Monkeys. Then they began to argue the question who was really the king of all the animals, and from that they discussed who would be the headman of the caravan when it should start out. The Alo Man got up and shook the rattles on his drum.

“They will meet some one at the end of the first day’s journey who will make them all run, — headman and porter, sick and well alike,” he said.

There were various guesses, but nobody guessed right.

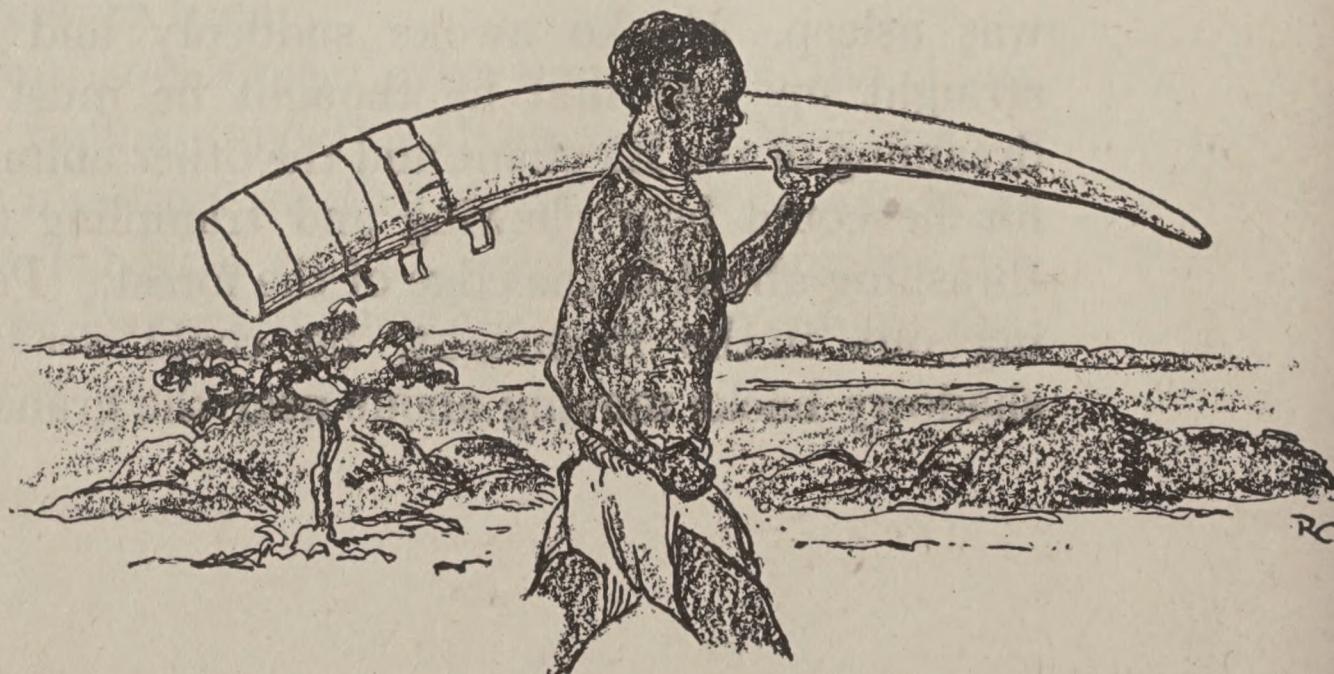
“The Hill-that-goes-down-quick,” said the Alo Man, holding his hand at a slope of about half a right angle, and there was a general shout, for everybody remembered the steep hill just beyond the bridge. Truly, as the Alo Man said, that would make any man run.

In the middle of the night, when everybody was asleep, Mpoko awoke suddenly and sat straight up. At first he thought he must be dreaming of the Elephant and the other animals, for he could hear chewing and trampling and thrashing about in the edge of the forest. Peering out in the moonlight, he could see big shadowy backs moving about near the granary,

and it did not take him a second to run out, shouting "Njoku! Njoku!"

The Alo Man heard him and was out in a minute. His father heard him and snatched up his spear and ran out, knocking up the other men. Almost before the dogs could begin to bark, the little village was as lively as an ant-hill.

Now the elephant, for all his size, is not a ferocious animal, and these elephants had come across that village only by accident. The three or four that were browsing about in the hope of finding something good were more surprised by the people than the people had been by them. In no very great time they went off, splashing and trampling and trumpeting through the forest. They left the maize field, however, in bad shape, and some of the huts were in worse shape still, for the elephants had gone right through them. When the timbers and thatch



pricked the big creatures, they were more than ever willing to go away from that place at once.

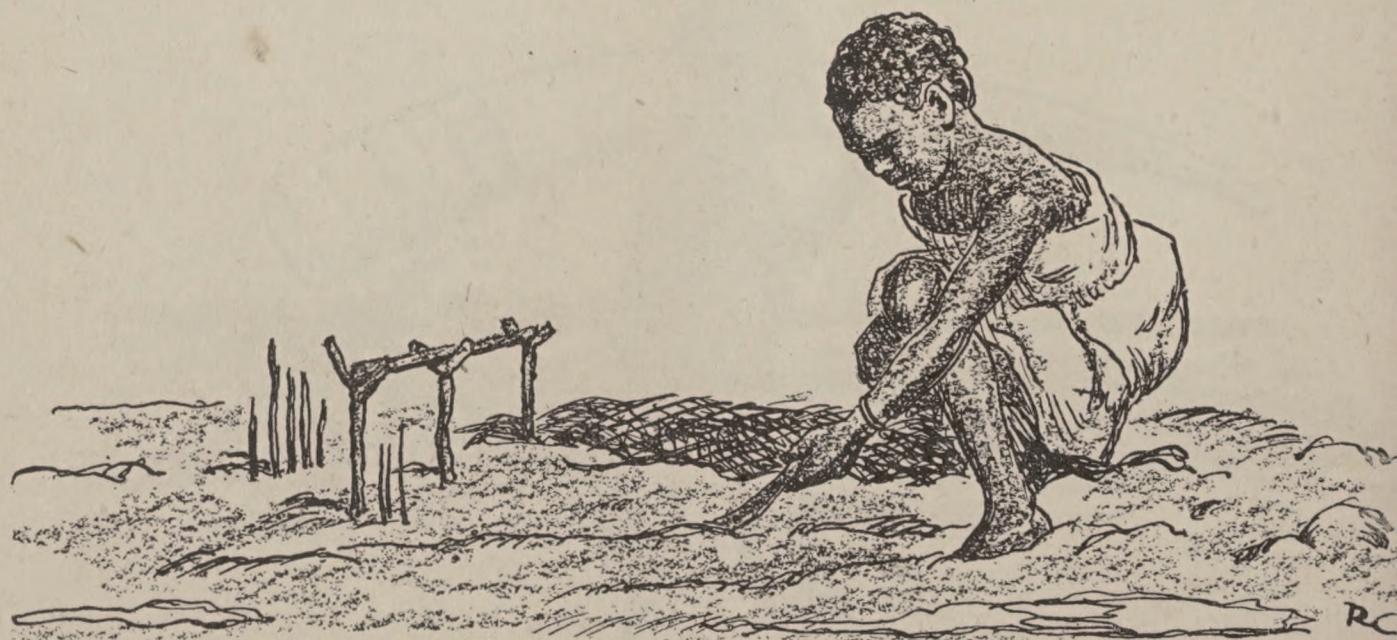
The hunters of the village had no mind to lose this chance. Waiting only to provide themselves with food, they set off on the trail, and managed during the next day to head the elephants round toward a pit they knew of which made a most effective elephant trap. Here they caught two large elephants with splendid tusks, and they came home in triumph with news of meat enough to provide a feast for the whole village, and a store of ivory for the king which was worth many brass rods.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CUSTOMS OF THE ANTS

THE following days were busy indeed in the village. There were so many things to see and to do that it was hard for any boy or girl to keep up with the times.

If one stayed to watch the women preparing the meat of the elephant for the great feast, one would miss the expedition into the forest to cut poles for new houses, and would not see the putting up of the framework and the construction of the roof. Nkunda spent some time helping to make the mud to plaster the walls of her mother's house, and any child who ever dabbled in mud and water with the feet knows how pleasant that is. Other children collected split bamboos and wet bark rope, and grass for thatching.



The house Mpoko and Nkunda saw going up was built without the use of nails or hammers or saws, planes, screws or chisels, foot rule or figures. First, a row of strong poles was planted along the line of the house wall and as high as the eaves would be — a little less than five feet. The mud floor inside was tramped down hard, and was a little higher than the level of the ground outside. The three forked posts supporting the ridgepole were about seven feet high.

Of course there were children who did not know the old riddle about the ridgepole posts. When Mpoko told them that there were three men carrying a dead one in their teeth over yonder, they ran very fast to the place at which he pointed. All that they saw, however, was three "king posts" just set up, with the ridgepole lying across them; and then they remembered that the forks of such a post are called *meno*, which means teeth. Then they went and found other children who had not heard the riddle and brought them to see; and before the roof was on, the joke had been told four or five times.

It was not hard to build little huts in the same way the men were putting up the big ones,

and when a group of children had just finished one Nkunda came by from the hen house.

"I have a house built without any door," said she. "The person who lives in it will come out when he is hungry."

Nobody could guess that riddle until Nkunda opened her little brown hand and showed them a new-laid egg.

"I know a riddle you have not heard," said Nkula. "My father's fowls laid their eggs under the leaves."

None of them had heard that one, but Nkunda happened to remember seeing Nkula munching peanuts a few minutes before and called out triumphantly, "Nguba!" Of course, the peanut, or "goober," hides its fruit under its leaves.

"The bird with its head cut off eats up all



the food," said their mother. The answer to that was easy when one saw the women grinding flour for bread. The stone on which grain, cassava, and plantains are pounded was the headless bird.

Then the Alo Man told them one that was new to them all.

"I went to a strange town and they gave me one-legged fowls to eat." The answer was "Mushrooms." Another new riddle was this: "A small stick may have many leaves and lose them all in a day." The stick was a market, and the leaves were the people.

With laughter and joking and singing, all the work went on, and before long the men were finishing the house walls. They bound split bamboo crosswise of the posts with wet bark rope, which shrinks as it dries and will last for years. The women plastered the wall inside and out with the mud which they had made at the nearest ant-hill by puddling earth and water with their feet. This mud was squeezed between the bamboos, and when it was dry, more was put on, until the walls were quite rain-proof.

When the walls were dry the frame of the roof, which had been made separately, was set on top,

and then the grass thatching was tied on in bundles, the upper row overlapping the lower as wooden shingles do. The rafters of the roof were the midribs of the raffia leaf. The house was divided within into the side for sleep and the side for fire.

In chilly weather a wood fire smoldered inside each hut, so that the walls and inside of the roof became black and shining with soot. The houses were used only to sleep in, to sit in on rainy days, and to hold various stores which must be kept dry; all the cooking, eating, and general work of the family were done outside. Moreover, a whole family did not live in a single house. Each grown person had a separate hut, the children usually staying with their mothers.

There was almost no furniture except that some houses had a mud platform with a grass bed on it. When the headman of the village presided on any formal occasion, he sat on a low stool cut out of a solid block of wood. The rest of the people sat on their heels and were perfectly comfortable, for they had always sat in that position. Food was served in wooden platters and calabashes, without tables. Baskets and jars served to hold things, and

there were no stoves, cupboards, bureaus, wash-stands, desks, sofas, or sideboards. The people made what they needed and wanted, and spent no time taking care of anything they did not want.

The village was fairly clean, for the dogs, fowls, and goats and the wild birds and animals ate up a great deal of garbage. If rubbish accumulated, it was carried off into the forest at certain times. There was always enough to eat of one kind of food or another, and enough to trade, for most of the things really needed could always be found in the great storehouse of the wilderness. If there had never been anything to be afraid of, the people would have lived comfortably year in and year out. But the shadow of danger was always hanging over them.

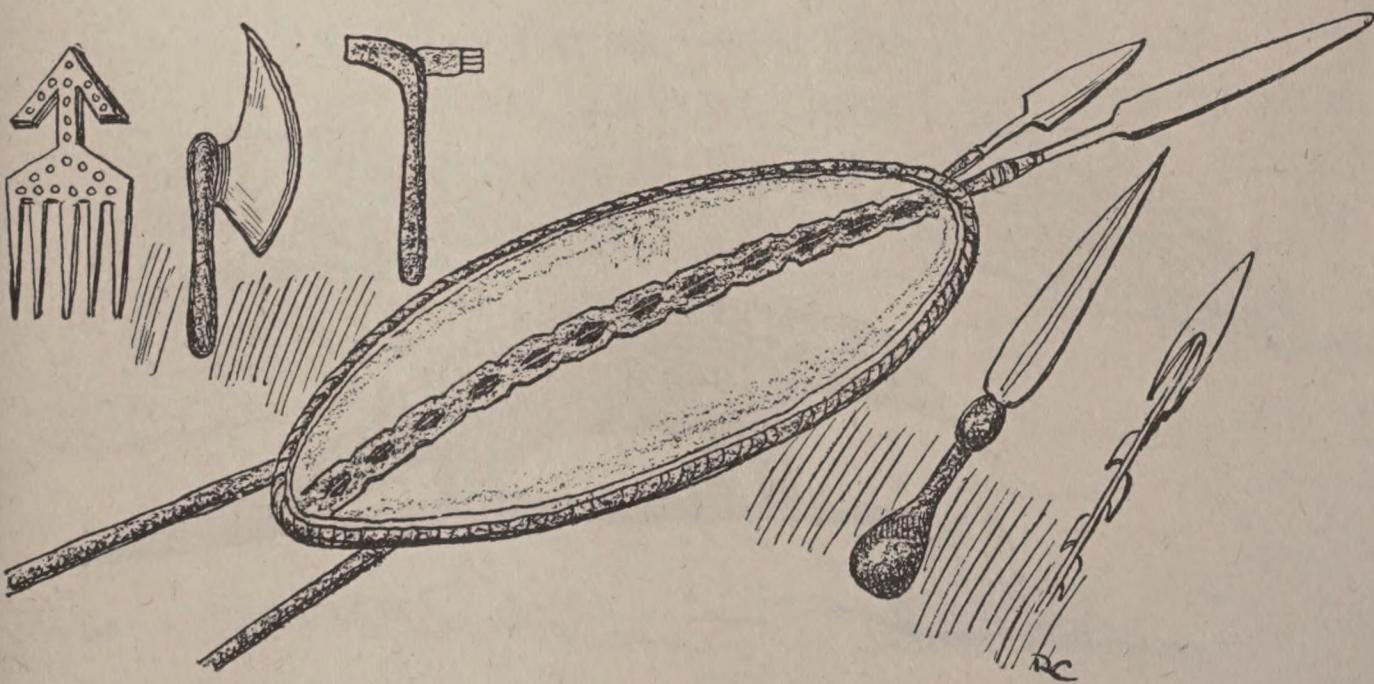
The men of the village had had a great deal of talk with the Alo Man about this fear of attack, and he was able to tell them several things about the ways of defending a country and of avoiding trouble, which he had seen in his travels. He had been among many different tribes, and some of the customs of which he told seemed very strange.

For instance, the Alo Man said that the

Wa-nkonda built their huts round, with the walls sloping out from the bottom like a basket, and the spaces between the bamboos were not plastered with mud but filled in with round bricks of white clay. This seemed to Mpoko and Nkunda like a great deal of needless trouble, but the Alo Man assured them that the Wa-nkonda would think their huts just as strange and outlandish. In some tribes the warriors used daggers with the ring-shaped hilt, and shields of hide or leather, and some preferred the bow and arrow to the spear. The Alo Man had seen a king's palace eighteen feet by twenty-five, with plank walls and thatched roof. This king owned ivory bows carved at the ends; the ivory would have snapped like a dry twig in any temperate climate, but the hot steamy air of Equatorial Africa kept it elastic. The same king had double drinking horns made of a pair of eland horns mounted in ivory; he had oil dishes of carved ivory shaped like little canoes or handled cups, and his women had combs and hairpins of carved ivory. The Alo Man had been a guest at a royal banquet, at which they served soup, sweet potatoes, greens, fish, boiled chicken, boiled pork, roast pig, rice pudding, and stewed guava. The women of the village

were proud to find that their own feast would have nearly everything on this list and a few other dishes besides.

Mpoko had reached an age when he was beginning to wonder about the reason for things, and he wondered a great deal about the constant danger of raids from enemies outside. He knew that he himself would probably be headman some day, for his mother was of a family even more important than his father's, and it was the mother's rank that counted in such matters. He asked the Alo Man some questions about the best way of defending one's village, and without saying anything very definite in reply the Alo Man went on to tell the story of the Quarrelsome Ants. The story perhaps gained in interest from the fact that several different kinds of ants were just then busy in plain sight.



I often see things [the Alo Man began] that remind me of the time when all the Ants met together in palaver under a large tree, like this one, to try to find some way of protecting themselves from their enemies.

“We have more enemies than any other creatures on earth,” groaned the Black Ants.

“We are perfectly helpless, whatever happens,” wailed the Red Ants. “A Centipede came to our village yesterday and ate up all our slaves before we could do anything.”

“The other creatures are so large,” lamented the Rice Ant. “They are provided with weapons suited especially to hurt us. The Anteater came to our hill and poked his long, slender tongue down every corridor and into every hole, and licked us up by the hundred.”

“If you had ever known what it was to be hunted by Birds,” said the Wagtail Ant, “you



would think other enemies were hardly worth minding."

"It does not matter which enemy is the worst," said the Gray Ant. "What we have to consider is the way to escape."

"Let us live underground," said the Rice Ant.

"Our enemies can burrow faster than we can," said the Red Ant.

"It would be better to take to the trees," said the Black Ant.

"So it might, if you are ready to walk into the mouth of some hungry Bird," said the Wagtail Ant.

"We can learn to fly," said the Gray Ant.

"Birds fly much better than we ever could," said the Rice Ant.

"We shall have to come to earth to eat or sleep," said the Red Ant.

"And when we do, our enemies will all be waiting for us," said the Wagtail Ant.

"Then, since we cannot live underground, on the ground, in the trees, or in the air, where are we to live?" asked the Black Ant. "I see no way but to fight."

"How do you expect to fight a Centipede?" asked the Red Ant.

“Or an Anteater?” asked the Red Ant.

“Or a great, pouncing Bird with a beak like a spear?” asked the Wagtail Ant.

Each insisted that his own way of escape would be effective and that every other plan was foolish and dangerous.

“There is nothing for us to do,” said the Black Ant at last, “but each to live as suits him best, for we shall never agree on a way of living that will suit us all. For my part, I intend to fight.”

Then the Black Ant and his people fought their way through the rest and departed in a column across the country.

The Red Ant built a strong castle with hundreds of winding passages and chambers, but no sooner was it done than the Anteater saw it. Clawing his way through the wall, he put in his long, slender tongue and licked up the inhabitants.

The Rice Ant burrowed under the earth, but no sooner had the many worms and burrowing insects learned of the new colony than they came and ate not only the grown Ants but the baby Ants and even the eggs.

The Wagtail Ant climbed the trees and hid under the bark, but Birds with long, slender

beaks pried into every crack and nipped the hidden Ants with their pincers.

The Gray Ant grew wings and learned to fly, and although he succeeded in dodging the Birds, he found that when he alighted and tried to hide in the leaves, the web of a Hunting Spider awaited him.

Meanwhile the King of the Insects had heard of their troubles, and he sent a message to the Ants, saying: "You will find safety only in union. Join all together, and, small as you are, you will be safe."

The Beetle, who was sent with the message, started out bravely, but bumped into a tree and hit himself a blow on the head which knocked the message completely out of it. Thus the Ants have never received the advice of the King.

Many of the men of the village had been listening to this story, and there was silence for a time after the Alo Man had finished.

"It is true," said one of the hunters at last, "we quarrel a great deal among ourselves, and we have not been able to agree with the other villages even about this expedition."

"But our own ways are the best," said another.

“Why should we change them for those of others?”

“That is what the people of Satu’s village say,” said the Alo Man.

“If there is ever a great meeting in which we are to plan how to defend ourselves against Tswki,” said Mpoko’s father, grimly, “I think we shall have to begin by making a law like that of the People of the Bandaged Faces.”

The others grinned, for they knew that story; but Mpoko could not imagine what his father meant, and there was no time just then to ask.

CHAPTER IX

THE FEAST IN THE VILLAGE

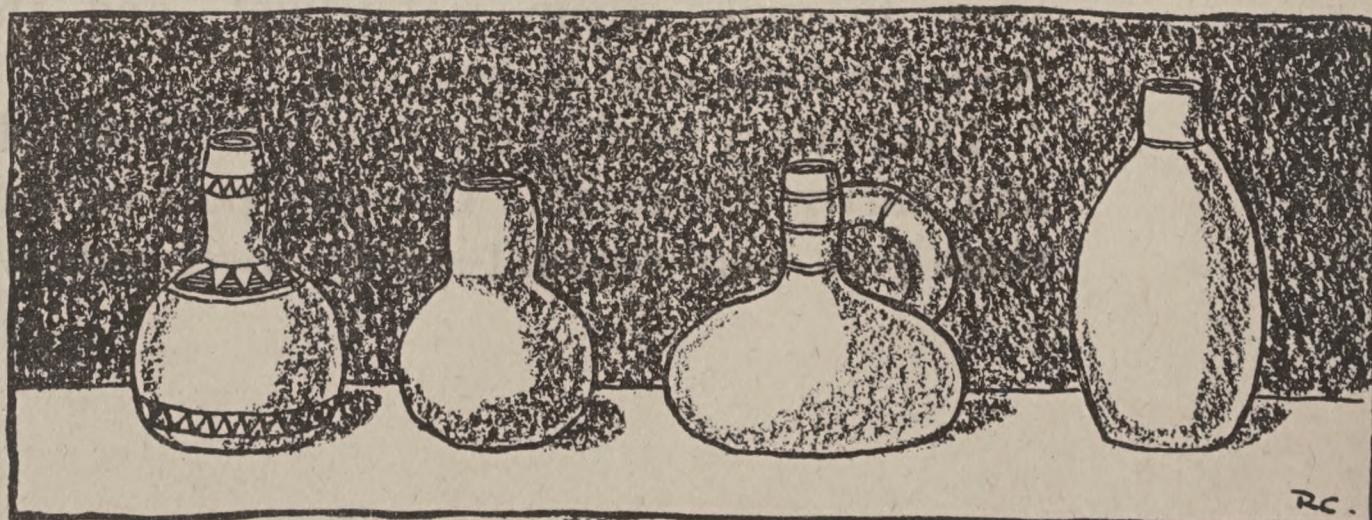
MPOKO and Nkunda could not remember any feast which was so great a feast as the one that celebrated the killing of the elephants. The preparation of food and the cooking of it took nearly every dish, pot, and pan to be found in the village. Some of these were of wood, some of iron, some of pottery, and some of basket-work. The framework of the baskets used for food was sometimes of wood, with thin strips of cane or narrow splints woven in and out, and maybe a wooden rim. Sometimes the white wood used for baskets and dishes was stained black, and a pattern was cut out by carving away the black surface, leaving a raised black decoration on white. Baskets could be so closely woven that they would hold milk. Some were made in the form of a demijohn, or bottle, and covered with rubber-like juice to make them water-tight, and these were generally used to hold beer.

The pottery used at the feast was partly plain and partly decorated. Cooking pots and porridge pots were straight-sided. Beer pots were

shaped like an egg with a hole in the end. Water jars were made oval with a spreading top, and there were round pots to hold the fat, salt, and spices used in cooking. Some of this ware was colored red with oxide of iron, and some was covered with a black glaze. It was made by hand, without any potter's wheel, dried in the sun, and then burned in a wood fire.

The making of the round dishes or cups called calabashes was even simpler. Some of them were made of gourds with the inside scooped out, and some were picked off a tree as they were. The curious tree called the baobab, which is one of the silk-cotton family of trees, bears a large, gourdlike fruit which the natives call monkey-bread. The shell is about the right size and shape for dishes, bowls, and cups.

One of the most important articles needed for the feast was palm oil, and it was good that there was a large supply on hand. In so hot a climate, with no ice or ice-boxes, it is out of the



question to keep butter for use in cooking. The palm oil is used for various purposes in cooking in place of butter, fat, lard, or olive oil. It is made from the fruit of the oil palm, which is an olive-shaped, plumlike fruit with a kernel inside a thick, fleshy outer envelope. The fruit grows in long red and yellow clusters. When the men have climbed up the palm tree and brought down the bunches, the fruits are cut off the main stem and cooked in water until they are soft and the kernel is loosened from the pulp. Then this pulp is pounded in a large mortar to free the kernels, which are put aside in a pile, and the thick, orange-colored, oily mass is dumped into a hollow log of wood like a trough. The log rests on crossed sticks so



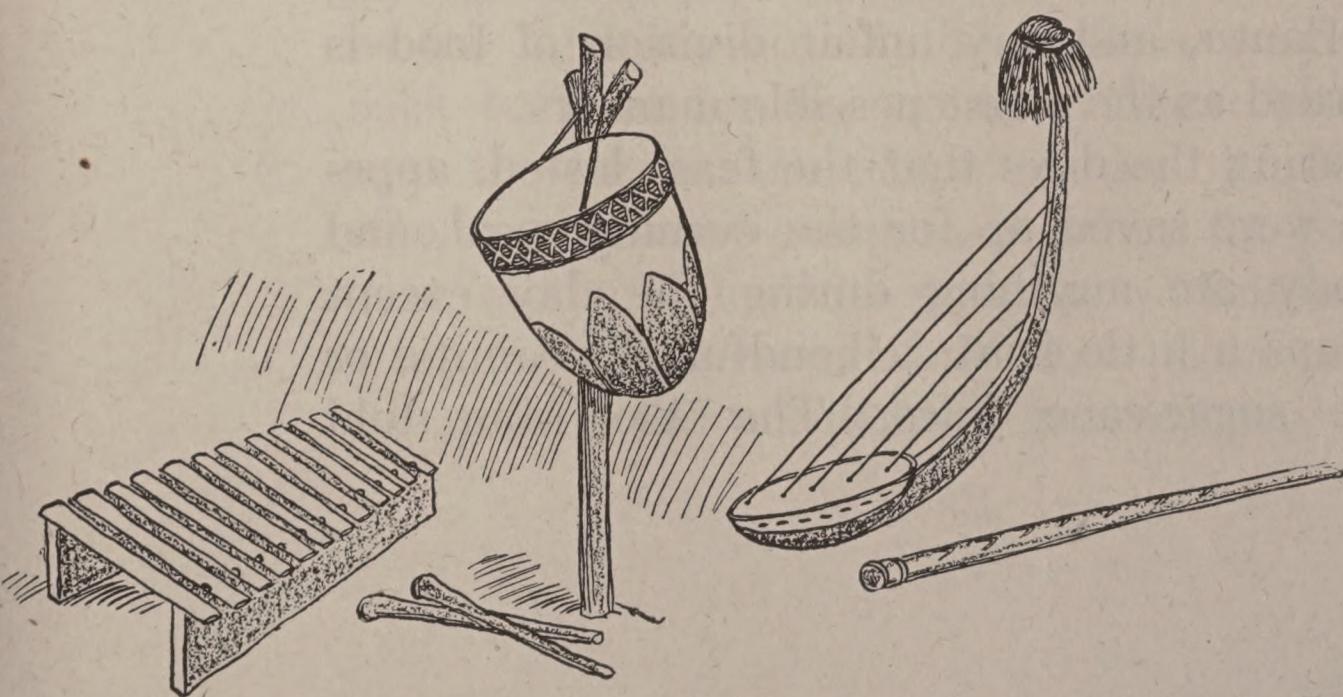
that it slopes at an angle of about forty-five degrees, and a pan or jar is set under the lower end to receive the oil. Hot stones are mixed with the pulp, and the oil, thinned by the heat, runs down into the jar. Sometimes the kernels are eaten, and sometimes they are pounded up to make more oil.

Palm oil was used for other things besides cooking. It could be burned in a homemade lamp,— an earthen dish with a floating wick,— and it was used for any ordinary purpose for which oil is used. Finally, it served the purpose of cold cream in massaging and oiling the skin. Before a feast, or after any great exertion, it was always used in this way, and the dancers who were to entertain the company began quite early to rub one another's limbs with oil from the little ornamental dishes of palm oil. However, there was plenty of oil for all these uses, without touching the supply in jars that would be carried to the coast traders, to be used in some far-away factory for making soap or candles.

Presently the guests began to gather and the musicians to play. Besides the drums with their boom! boom! boom! there were several other instruments — the sansi, a kind of wooden

piano or xylophone, the marimba, another form of the same thing, flutes made of hollow reed, and a guitar-like instrument with the body of it covered with skin. The dancers soon assembled, and the rattles tied to their ankles and the clapping of the hands of the spectators kept time to the wild music. This entertainment would go on all night, probably for two or three nights.

When it was time for the feast to begin, girls and boys went about first of all with water in calabashes and jars, that every one might rinse out his mouth and wash his hands before eating. Mpoko and Nkunda had been taught always to do this before a meal, and they had also a kind of wooden toothbrush which kept the teeth cleaner, if anything, than the ones sold in shops. Some people say that the care which these tribes take of their teeth is the



reason why they usually have such very white and sound ones.

The men and women did not eat together. The principal men were served first, and after they had taken what they chose from the dishes, the women and children had the rest in their turn. Meat and gravy were cooked in one dish, dumplings, kwanga, or cooked rice were served in another, vegetables in another. The people ate with their fingers. A lump of kwanga, dumpling, bread, or cooked rice was taken in the fingers and dipped in the broth. The dumpling was swallowed whole; it could not be chewed, as it would stick to the teeth like so much glue, but it would slip down whole like an oyster. Groups of friends or relatives ate together, and good breeding was shown in the special care which every well-brought-up guest would take, to eat no more than his proper share. Greediness is very unpopular among the Bantu, and any unfair division of food is regarded as the worst possible manners.

During the days that the feast lasted, appetites were saved up for the evening meal, and nobody ate anything during the day except perhaps a little fruit, a handful of peanuts, or some sugar-cane juice. The Alo Man told

tales, there was much dancing and singing, naps were taken at any time of day by those who were sleepy, and the children played many games. The children often made almost as much noise as the grown people, for the boys had a band of their own. Nkula, who had a biti — a kind of marimba — which he had made for himself, was leader.

A game that was a general favorite was played with the biti and the other instruments, and a needle. In playing it, the boys divided into two camps, Mpoko being captain of one, and Satu, a boy from a neighboring village, of the other. Boko, one of Mpoko's players, was sent out of sight and hearing, and Mpoko then took a needle — a rather large bone needle used for raffia or sinew — and hid it so that both camps would know where it was. Meanwhile Satu's camp had agreed upon a certain note in the scale played on the biti, which should be the "guiding note." Then Boko was called back to hunt for the needle. When he came near the needle, the player of the biti, Nkula, who was in Satu's camp, must sound the guiding note, mixing it up with as many variations and other notes as he could, and when Boko moved away from the needle, the guiding note must

not be sounded. Of course, if Nkula did not keep to this rule Mpoko's side would make trouble for him. To win for his side, Boko must not only find the needle but must name the guiding note.

Boko had a quick ear, and he was a shrewd boy. Within two or three minutes he was nearly sure where the needle was, but he was not certain about the guiding note. Satu's side made such a racket that all the notes in the scale seemed to be part of it. Mpoko felt more than once like calling out "Otuama" (you are warm) when Boko stopped two or three times almost on top of the needle, but of course that would never do. Then Boko walked across the ground and came back, went straight to the hiding place, picked up the needle, and sounded the correct guiding note!

After they had kept quiet, watching the search for the needle, as long as active boys could, they played the game called "antelope." Boko, having won in the last game, was antelope. A line was scratched on the ground, marking out a large court, and all the boys except Boko got down on all fours with their faces uplifted. They were the hunters, and they tried to touch Boko with their hands, or kick him with their feet,

or butt him with their heads, or pen him up between them and the boundary line. Since they had to chase him on all fours, Boko had an advantage, and once he jumped right over a hunter who almost had him. When they finally did get him hemmed in and he ran out of the ring, they all got on their feet and chased him, and Nkula, the first to touch him, was antelope in his turn.

Some of the smaller children were playing a game of their own, under a bush where the fowls had been having a dust bath. The large, black, glossy *loso* (canna seeds) were used in this game. While one player went out, the others hid a canna seed in one of five little heaps of dirt. The searcher had to sweep away the four heaps that did not hold any seed, and leave untouched the heap that did. If he guessed correctly, it counted one game for his side.

When they were tired of "antelope," the older boys played a rather difficult memory game, called "loso," with forty canna seeds. Satu and Mpoko chose sides, and all sat on the ground around an open space. Satu, taking twenty seeds in each hand, led the play. His side had agreed beforehand that the seventh seed thrown

should be the “playing seed,” and the other side would have to guess which it was, and pick it up. Satu threw first a seed from the right hand, then one from the left, counting aloud as he threw until he had thrown ten all together — solo, beri, tatu, inno, tano, tandatu, pungati, inani, kenda, ikundi. Then he threw down the other seeds helter skelter, without counting, but so as not to disturb the first ten where they lay.

Then Satu chose Boko to go away out of sight and hearing of the game, and Mpoko and his players consulted as to which the “playing seed” was. In throwing the seeds, Satu had tried not to call attention to pungati, the seventh seed, in any way, and had told his players not to seem to be watching it when he threw it. They did not. They were so very, very careless just at that moment that Mpoko wondered if that were not the “playing seed.” He took note where it fell and saw that it lay near a little hump in the ground. When he told his players what he thought, they said that he was likely to be right, and when he picked up the seventh seed and said, “This is the playing seed and its name is pungati,” Satu admitted that it was and that Mpoko had won.

Of course, if Satu and his side were dishonest players they might deny that the seed picked up was the playing seed. But that would do them no good, for Boko, who had been sent out of sight and hearing, was a check on them. How the check worked was shown when Mpoko in his turn threw the seed. This time the third seed, tatu, was the "playing seed." It was the turn of Satu's side to guess, and they disagreed. Satu thought it was the fifth, and the others were divided between the third and the sixth. In the end they took a chance, and Satu, picking up the fifth seed, said, "This is the playing seed, and its name is tano." But it wasn't the playing seed.

Still, Satu's side had one more chance. Mpoko had sent Nkula out of sight and hearing before the discussion began, and Nkula would have to come back and pick up the playing seed, depending on his memory of the way in which the seeds lay when he left the circle. Mpoko touched tatu, the playing seed, and then called Nkula back. Everybody watched, breathless. If Nkula touched the wrong seed, Satu's side would still win. But he didn't. Nkula had a good memory, and he remembered that tatu, the playing seed, lay at one end of a line of three,

the only three seeds close together in a straight line. He picked it up and said, "This is the playing seed, and its name is tatu."

It will be seen that it is almost impossible to cheat in this game. If Satu had really picked up the right seed, and Mpoko had denied that he did, then when Nkula came back there would have been no right seed on the ground; and if Mpoko pointed to the wrong seed, the chances were all against Nkula's guessing that one seed, out of the thirty-nine still remaining on the ground.

The old hunters who were looking on very much approved of this game, which they had played when they were boys, and their fathers and grandfathers before them. A good player must have a quick eye and a good memory, both of which are most needful in hunting. As the Bantu proverb has it, "For a running antelope one needs a running shot."

The next game, Mbele, or the Knife, trained not only the eye but the limbs, and was sometimes played by boys and girls alike. All the players stood in line, Satu at the head and Mpoko next him. Satu stepped out and faced Mpoko, and holding up both hands waved them about, and then shot out one hand quickly.

Mpoko countered with the corresponding hand. This was done three times, and the third time Mpoko missed, for he was in too much of a hurry and answered the wrong gesture. Nkula, who came next, failed also; but in Boko, Satu met his match, and Boko became "King" in his turn, while Satu went to the foot of the line. If the King could go down the line without meeting his match, the last one in the line would be called a slave, and would go out. Sometimes — so Mpoko's father told them — Satu's father, as King, had gone up and down the line until all the other players were slaves.

Games such as these not only teach the players to move promptly, see correctly and remember what they see, but give them practice in judging by the expression of a person's face what he is about to do or what he is thinking. When a boy trained in games of the wits, like these, grows up and becomes a chief or a trader, it is very hard for any one to deceive him, or to read his face when he does not wish his thoughts to be known. They are also games which must be played fairly if there is to be any fun in them.

Besides playing their games, the boys wrestled, ran races, had contests in high jumping, and did as much bragging and arguing as is usual

in a crowd of boys on a three days' holiday. On the third day the boys from Satu's village and Mpoko and his friends got into an argument, and there was a quarrel which attracted the attention of the fathers and led to punishment.

That evening Mpoko remembered something. He sidled over to the Alo Man, who was just then sitting by himself mending a marimba, and said, "What is the story about the People with the Bandaged Faces?"

"Ho!" said the Alo Man. "Do you think that fashion is a good one?"

"I don't know," said Mpoko. "I should like to see some people with their faces bandaged."

"Perhaps they might like to see you with yours bandaged, too," said the Alo Man. "However, this is the story."

Once the Rabbit went on a long journey, and lost his way. When he had wandered a long time he came to a town where there was a market place, but the market place was very still. There were many people, wearing bandages of white cloth over their faces, who were coming and going and exchanging their produce for brass rods, mirrors, trader's cloth, and ivory.

trumpets. But none of them said a single word.

“Ho!” said the Rabbit, “this is a very queer place. Curious kind of people these must be.”

He spoke to one and another, asking for food and oil and offering to pay, but although they gave him all that he needed and took his beads in payment, not one of them said a word in reply.

It was so queer in that place that the Rabbit began to be frightened, and at last he left the market place and went on, looking back over his shoulder until he was out of sight. When he came to a house he found an old man, and he asked the old man what was the matter with the people of that market, who went and came and bought and sold, and never said a word.

“That is their custom,” said the old man. “A long time ago they got into the habit of quarreling and arguing with one another until nobody had any peace from morning till night. Each market day it was worse than the last. Finally the King heard of it and was angry with them for their foolishness, and he made a law that in that village, when the people went to market, each must leave his lower jaw at home.”

CHAPTER X

HOW THE CARAVAN SET FORTH

WHEN the great feast was over and the guests had gone home, it was time to begin in earnest preparations for the caravan. This had been discussed by the headmen in the intervals of feasting and entertainment, and it had been agreed that one of the best-known wizards of that country should come and make luck charms and see that everything was properly done when the company took its departure. As this village was farther down the river than the others, it was to be the place of meeting.

Among other matters, the men from different villages had discussed what goods were most likely to be profitable in trading. They all agreed that the traders were not like the Bantu people, who prefer to do the same things and follow the same customs year in and year out; the traders were forever changing their minds. Things which used to be much in demand were now not wanted. The older men, for example, could remember how, when they were boys, camwood and barwood and African mahogany

were asked for. It was said that in some parts of the forest it paid even now to take ebony and teak and other kinds of lumber to the coast. But this was only where the logs could go down by water. There were too many rapids and the distance was too great to make any such trade profitable for this village.

Camwood is very good for cabinet work; it is light brown when cut, and with exposure to the air turns a beautiful deep red-brown. Bar-wood is sometimes used for violin bows. Both these trees are cousins of the California redwoods, though they do not grow to be giants. But in the days when the traders bought the wood, it was not for cabinet work; it was for dyestuffs. Before aniline dye was invented, the rich dull red of Madras handkerchiefs was made by boiling the chips of these woods in water. Such a dye would not fade like the colors in the cloth now sold by the traders.

The most profitable thing found in the great forest storehouse was rubber. Mpoko himself had helped get some of the supply of it that was waiting to go down to the coast. This work of getting rubber is done usually in August, or from October to March during the dry season, when there is not so much to do on the farms and

it is pleasanter to work in the woods. The women prepare about three weeks' food for the rubber gatherers, who camp in the woods while the work goes on.

The latex, or sap, is collected in various ways. A cut may be made in the tree and a broken bottle, a large snail shell, or a gourd fastened below to receive the sap. Rubber is also obtained from lianas or vines which are sometimes cut up to let the sap drain into basins from both ends of the stem at once. Toward evening or in the early morning the sap is collected and put into iron pots. It is a rather thick, milky juice, and the rubber is separated from the watery fluid either by boiling or by adding lime juice or tannin squeezed from wild fruits. Then it is dried, in the form of strips, or strips rolled into a ball, or flat cakes, over the smoke of a wood fire. Sometimes it is soaked



in streams to clear out the impurities, a practice which adds to its weight but is not honest. One man can collect three or four pounds a day, for which the trader will pay a shilling a pound.

Another thing that was going into the packs of the porters now was raffia. In the old days this was never valuable. Now there seemed to be a market for it. It was first exported in 1890, the price then being from \$300 to \$350 a ton. Later it was about \$100. Long before it was known to our schools for basket making and mat making, the Bantu people used the long, tough strips for netting, weaving, and many other purposes.

When the men went into the forest to add raffia and some other things to their stock for the trading journey, Mpoko and Nkula went with them. The forest was a wonderful place even to them, who had never known any other country, and to a civilized boy it would have looked like fairyland. Monkeys leaped and chattered in the branches, and birds of many sorts, many of them splendid in coloring, hopped and flew among the trees. There were wild canaries, waxbills, crows, now and then a red-tailed gray parrot, and the bright-colored plantain-eater, or touraco, as the boys called it.

This bird, a distant cousin of the cuckoo, has a crest like a jay's, which it can raise or lower, and its call sounds almost exactly like "touraco, tu-ra-co!" The queerest-looking bird of all, perhaps, was the ground hornbill, which is as common about African villages as a crow. This bird looks as if it had been trying to imitate the rhinoceros, for it has a great horny bill with a thick lump on what might be called the bridge of the nose. It is useful to the villager, for it is a sort of street cleaner in feathers, and eats garbage, rats, snakes, lizards, and other small creatures, with great relish.

Mpoko and Nkula caught a bunting to take home and tame, and they came upon a little group of the dome-shaped huts of the weaver bird. On the way home the party went out of its way to the Red Rocks. This was the name the boys had for them, but the place was really an outcrop of iron ore, red with rust from the air and the dampness. While the men were



getting out some lumps of ore to be made into weapons, the boys went exploring and found something surprising on their own account.

In a little clearing farther up the mountain, great yellow globes were shining on the ground among coarse vines. They were pumpkins. But how came pumpkins away up there, miles away from any farm or house? It really looked like witchery. But when the hunters saw them they laughed and said that the boys had happened on the Elephant's Garden. These had sprung up from seeds of the pumpkins carried off by elephants from some settlement.

If the loads had not already been heavy enough, more of the pumpkins would have been carried away, and as it was, the two which Mpoko and Nkula carried were quite heavy enough before they had a chance to drop them. Iron was more important just then.

Nkula's father was the smith and ever since they could remember, Nkula and Mpoko had watched the business of making iron tools and weapons. Very few boys outside the jungle know as much as these two did about the way in which iron is made into useful articles.

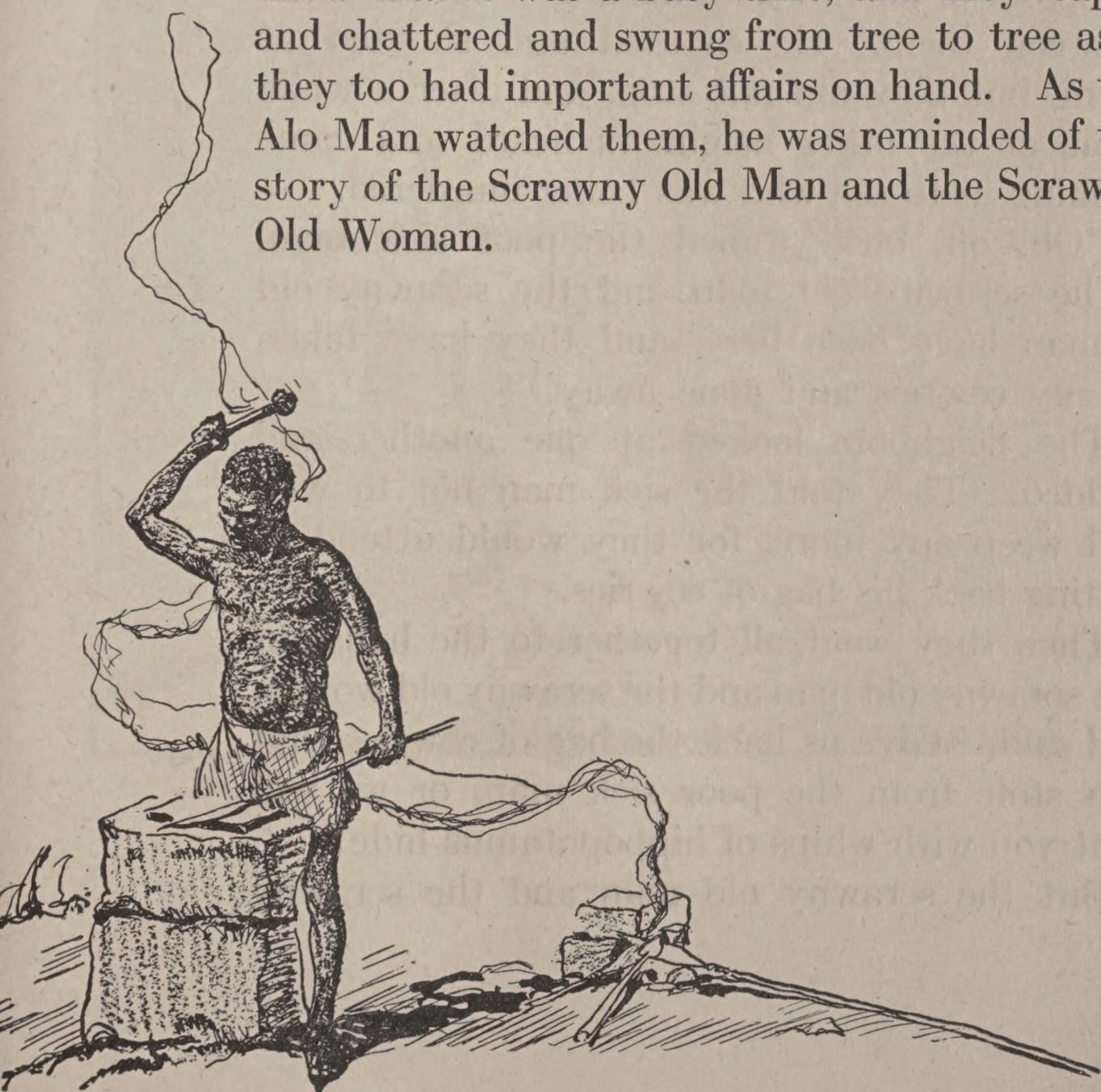
The iron as it is found in that country is not so mixed with other minerals as to be hard to

separate. Sometimes a lump would be found almost pure. But in order to make it suitable for the blacksmith's hammer, it had to be smelted. A furnace was made of clay, and a hole was dug in the ground, big enough to sink it in. Around this hole a clay wall was built up into a sort of chimney, and a tunnel was dug from a little distance away, down to the charcoal fire at the bottom of the furnace. The fire, which must be kept up to the very greatest possible heat, was fed with fresh air through this tunnel by means of a goatskin bellows with a stone nozzle. After two or three hours of uninterrupted heat, there would be a lump of pig iron, and the impurities could be hammered out and the metal worked into shape on a forge.

Nkula's father knew how to make spear heads, ax heads, knives with leaf-shaped or curved blades, and iron wire, which, when passed red-hot over buffalo horn, blackened and became nearly rust-proof. Iron wire could also be polished and used for ornaments, although the people preferred brass wire, which would not rust. Among the things which Nkunda's mother treasured was a necklace of grayish-brown mottled nuts like pairs of little pyramids set base to base, fastened together, not by a string,

but by little links of iron wire. A cross formed of the nuts made a kind of pendant, and although nobody in the village knew it, the necklace had probably been made in some coast village, for a rosary, from the nuts of a eucalyptus or "fever tree" near a mission settlement.

While the preparations for the expedition were going on, even the monkeys appeared to know that it was a busy time, and they leaped and chattered and swung from tree to tree as if they too had important affairs on hand. As the Alo Man watched them, he was reminded of the story of the Scrawny Old Man and the Scrawny Old Woman.



I often tell [said he] of the scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman who lived in a hut in the forest. They always complained of being very poor and having hardly enough to eat, but by and by the neighbors noticed that after the two had visited at any house, something or other was always missed. Then one day a neighbor who was sick in bed awoke to see them going out of his hut with his bag of cowrie shells between them. He shouted and shouted at them, but they did not stop, and after a while some of the other neighbors heard and came running in to see who was being murdered.

“Oh, oh, oh!” wailed the poor sick man. “The scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman have been here, and they have taken all my cowries and gone away!”

The neighbors looked at one another and nodded. They told the sick man not to wail and weep any more, for they would attend to getting back his bag of cowries.

Then they went all together to the house of the scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman and said, “Give us back the bag of cowries that you stole from the poor sick man, or we will beat you with whips of hippopotamus hide!”

But the scrawny old man and the scrawny



old woman cried and howled and said that they had not taken the bag of cowries. And when the neighbors searched the hut they did not find it.

But the neighbors still believed that the scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman had taken the bag of cowries, and they said, "We will come with our whips of hippopotamus hide and you shall eat whip until you give back the cowries that you stole."

Then while the neighbors went to fetch their whips, the scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman climbed up and got the bag of cowries, which they had hidden in the thatch of the roof, and ran with it into the forest. But they were not quite quick enough. The neighbors saw them and came after them so fast with their whips of hippopotamus hide, that at last the scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman had to climb into a tree.

"You shall not come down from the tree," cried the neighbors, looking up at the scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman where they squatted among the branches, "until you give back the cowries that you stole from the poor sick man."

"We will stay in this tree until they go away,

and then we will climb down and escape," said the scrawny old man to the scrawny old woman.

The neighbors heard what he said, and they shouted, "We will stay under the tree until you come down."

"When they go home to get their supper we will climb down and run away very fast in the dark," said the scrawny old woman to the scrawny old man.

The neighbors heard her, and they shouted, "We will build huts under the tree and take turns watching for you to come down."

And so they did.

Days passed, then weeks, then months. The scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman sat in the tree waiting for the neighbors to go away, and the neighbors sat under the tree waiting for them to come down. The scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman became very hungry. First they ate the fruit of the tree; then they ate the kernels; then they ate the young leaves; then they ate the old leaves; at last they stripped the bark off the branches and ate that. They grew scrawnier and scrawnier every day. Their eyes had sunk in their heads with sleeplessness. Their teeth grew long and sharp with cracking the kernels

of the fruit and gnawing the bark from the tree. They almost forgot how to talk.

One day the scrawny old man held out his scrawny old hand and said, "See how tough the skin is!" And the scrawny old woman held out her scrawny old hand and said, "My hand is just as tough as yours!"

Then they looked at their feet and saw that the skin of their feet had grown tough also; and their toe nails and finger nails had grown long, like claws, with holding on so firmly to the branches of the tree.

"It is very strange," said the scrawny old man.

"Indeed, it is very strange," said the scrawny old woman.

Then the new year came with its heavy rains, and the scrawny old man and scrawny old woman shivered with cold. One morning the scrawny old man said to the scrawny old woman, "This is very strange. You are all covered with hair."

And the scrawny old woman said to the scrawny old man, "It is surely very strange, but so are you."

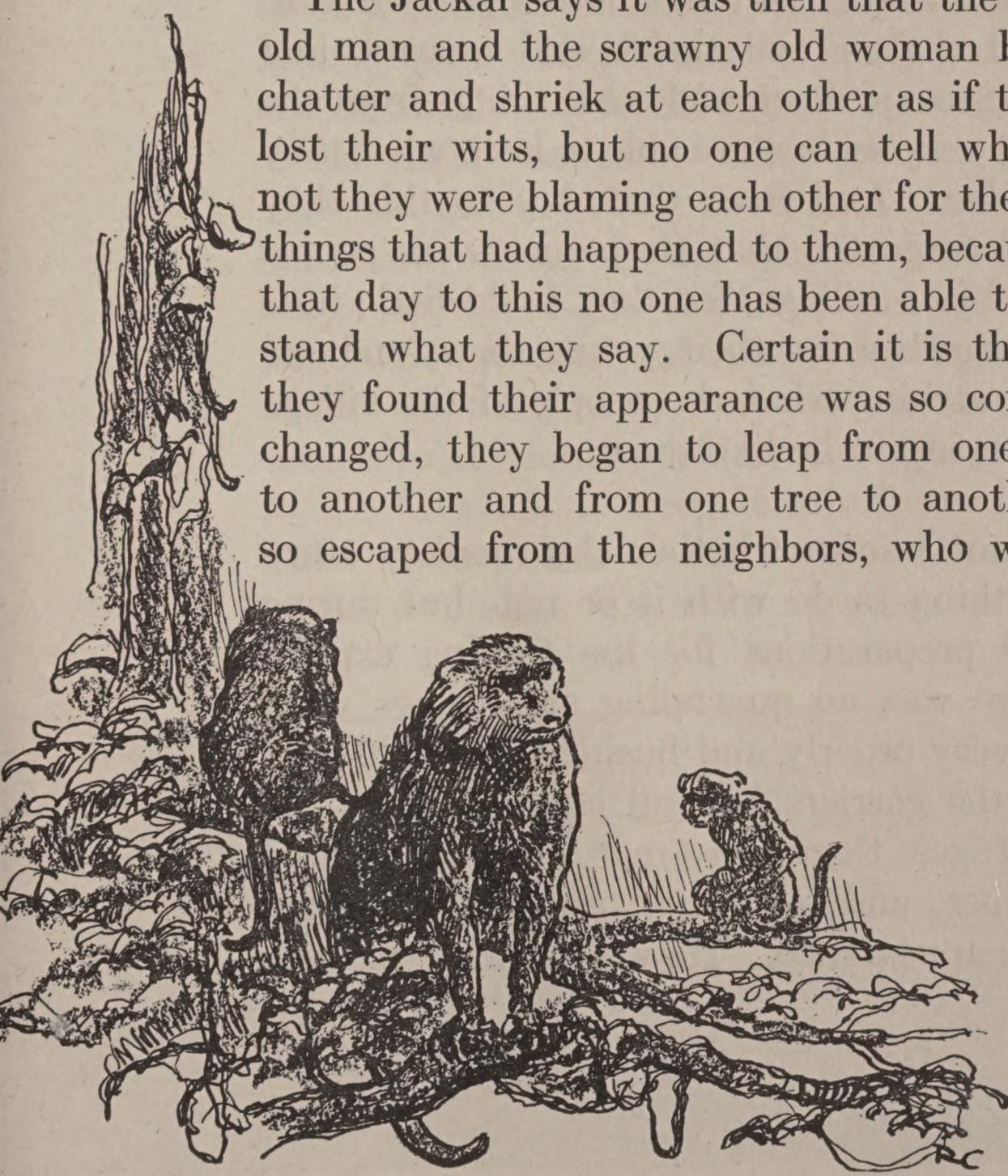
It really seemed as if they were not the same persons that they were when they climbed into the tree.

Then one morning the scrawny old man said to the scrawny old woman, "I have a very strange feeling at the end of my spine."

"So have I!" said the scrawny old woman. "What can be going to happen now?"

And behold, each had a tail just beginning to grow!

The Jackal says it was then that the scrawny old man and the scrawny old woman began to chatter and shriek at each other as if they had lost their wits, but no one can tell whether or not they were blaming each other for the strange things that had happened to them, because from that day to this no one has been able to understand what they say. Certain it is that when they found their appearance was so completely changed, they began to leap from one branch to another and from one tree to another, and so escaped from the neighbors, who were still



at the foot of the tree, waiting for them to come down. But they let go the bag of cowries in their flight, and it fell to the ground and was picked up by the neighbors, who carried it back to the poor sick man.

And from that day to this the People of the Trees have all been little scrawny old men and old women who chase one another from tree to tree, and chatter and shriek and quarrel, and sometimes come down and steal things from the huts, but very seldom are able to keep what they have stolen. And from that day to this they have not forgotten that they once were people and lived in a village, for they build little huts in the branches for their young ones, and are always watching what the people of the village do and trying to be like them.

It is not known whether the monkey story had anything to do with it or not, but during the final preparations for the trading expedition there was no quarreling and things went on in a very orderly and businesslike fashion.

When the carriers had all come in from the other villages, there were more than a hundred all together, and last of all the medicine man made his appearance. He was a little, wizened,

shrewd-looking old fellow who carried a charm bag and a wooden fetich image which nobody would have touched for anything. It must have been at least three or four hundred years old, for it was a stumpy carved statue of a Portuguese sea captain in the dress of the sixteenth century, and the wood had turned almost black with age. Nobody in Africa could possibly have seen anything like it for many generations, and naturally it was thought to be magic.

The medicine man called all the headmen together and sat them down in a circle, he and his fetich occupying the middle. On his head was a crown of gay feathers, and his costume was made up chiefly of rattles, beads, and ornaments of magical power. He made a little speech to the fetich, asking it to give good luck to the caravan, to keep it safe from danger of water, flame, or iron, and to make it successful in its dealings. Then he sacrificed a chicken



to the fetich, and the chicken was solemnly cooked and eaten by the company. No one in the caravan could after that enter his house or turn back upon the road. The medicine man selected charms from those in his charm bag — herbs, spices, feathers, and little bones — and put them in a shell which he set in the middle of the trail. Then the caravan was ready to start. The long procession of traders, porters, headmen, and soldiers moved in a swinging stride down the path, each one stepping over the shell and not looking back. No one touched the shell, which was very lucky, and whether the medicine man's ceremonies had anything to do with it or not, the expedition returned safely in due time, with a tale of good luck on the trail and success in the trading.

CHAPTER XI

THE HYRAX AND THE ELEPHANT

THE returning caravan brought new people to the village. It had met an Arab trader coming up the river with his porters and some armed men for a bodyguard. The Arab could speak a little Bantu, and the language he talked to his men was a dialect called Swahili, which is something like Bantu and is spoken by most of the traders. When he saw the villagers' rubber and palm oil and heard about their country, he seemed much interested, and wished to try their markets. He seemed very glad of their company on the journey.

When he showed his wares, there was great excitement in the village. He had brass rods, of course, and glass bottles of perfumery that smelled stronger than a whole tree in blossom. The bottles themselves would do to make into bangles; some of the Bantu tribes understood how to melt glass and make it into ornaments. He had little bright mirrors, gay cloth, and knives that were more shiny and attractive than any the people had seen, though Nkula's father said that they were not very sharp. The

trader wore clothes all over him, and a white cloth on his head; in the sash round his waist were stuck strange weapons, and he did not eat as they did in the village. He had his own cook.

The Alo Man did not say much about the trader, and he was polite enough to him; but Mpoko felt sure that he did not like the stranger. It is possible to say many things without words.

As time went on, pleasant as it was to see all these new things and share in the presents the trader gave, Nkunda and some of the other children began to wish he would go away soon. Everybody was so cross in these days that there was no comfort in living. Even the mother of Mpoko and Nkunda, who was usually very gentle and kind, had said sharp words now and then. In some of the other families the mothers whipped the children all round with no excuse whatever.

When the trader and his men had gone to the Nkenge market, two days' journey away, every one was glad to hear the drum sound after supper for a dance and some story-telling. Mpoko climbed up in the big tree under which the chief held his councils and gave his judgments, to get a better view of the dancing. When that was over and the story began, he let

himself down to a lower branch, and lay along it like a little tree animal. He was almost as much at home in the trees as on the ground. Sometimes he would go up to the very tiptop of some giant of the forest and perch among the cool green leaves, looking out over the great green sea of tree tops and tree ferns beneath him, and thinking.

Tonight the story was about the Elephant and the Hyrax. One of the hunters that day had brought home a hyrax from the rocky hillside where he had been hunting, and that may have been what reminded the Alo Man of the story. The hyrax is a little beast about as big as a rabbit and something like one, but with ears like a guinea pig; and although neither the story-teller nor his listeners knew it, he is a very distant cousin of the rhinoceros, the elephant, and the other thick-skinned animals. But he



has no tusks or horns, and he wears a coat of grayish-brown fur, and hides in holes among the rocks.

In the days when all the animals lived in villages and owned plantations [began the Alo Man], there were a Hyrax and his wife who had a little son. Father Hyrax was so proud of his baby that he told Mother Hyrax to ask for anything she liked and she should have it.

“I should like the skin of an Elephant,” said she, for she thought that her husband could do anything.

The Hyrax did not know what to say to this astonishing request, but he knew that if he did not keep his word to his wife she would have no respect for him. At last he went to a very old Hyrax whose fur was entirely white and who lived in a den by himself far up on the mountain, and asked his advice.

“It is almost harvest time,” said the very old Hyrax when he had heard the story. “Go and ask the Earthworm, the Cock, the Cat, the Dog, the Hyena, the Leopard, and the Elephant to come and help you with your harvest. When they come, you will see what to do.”

“I do not understand,” said the Hyrax.

“No matter,” said the very old Hyrax. “Do as I tell you, and all will be well.”

The Hyrax did exactly as he had been told, and asked all the creatures to come and help him with his harvest. All promised to come. Then he went home and waited.

Early in the morning the Earthworm came with his spear and his hoe and went to work. Next the Cock appeared with his spear and his hoe.

“Is any one here?” asked the Cock.

“The Earthworm has come. He is at work over there,” said the Hyrax.

“He will make a fine breakfast for me,” said the Cock, and he gobbled the Earthworm and went to work.

Then the Cat came with his spear and his hoe.

“Is any one here?” asked the Cat.

“The Cock is here. He is at work yonder,” said the Hyrax.

“He will make a good meal for me,” said the Cat, and he pounced on the Cock and ate him up, and then went to work.

Then the Dog appeared with his spear and his hoe.

“Is any one here?” asked the Dog.

“The Cat is here. He is already at work,” said the Hyrax.

“He will make a good dinner for me,” said the Dog, and he grabbed the Cat and ate him up, and went to work.

The Hyena came next, and he ate the Dog. The Leopard came next, and he ate the Hyena. Last of all came the Elephant with his spear and his hoe.

“Is any one here?” asked the Elephant.

“The Leopard is here and is at work yonder,” said the Hyrax.

“Did any one come before the Leopard?” inquired the Elephant.

“The Hyena.”

“And before the Hyena?”

“The Dog.”

“And before the Dog?”

“The Cat.”

“And before the Cat?”

“The Cock.”

“And before the Cock?”

“The Earthworm.”

The Elephant looked about and did not see any of these other animals.

“What became of the Earthworm?” he asked.

“The Cock ate him.”

“And what became of the Cock?”

“The Cat ate him.”

“And what became of the Cat?”

“The Dog ate him.”

“And what became of the Dog?”

“The Hyena ate him.”

“And what became of the Hyena?”

“The Leopard ate him.”

The Elephant looked at the Leopard at work in the field.

“Then,” he said, “I must eat the Leopard or I shall not be respected by all the other animals. But if I am to do this I must come up behind him and strike him with my trunk.”

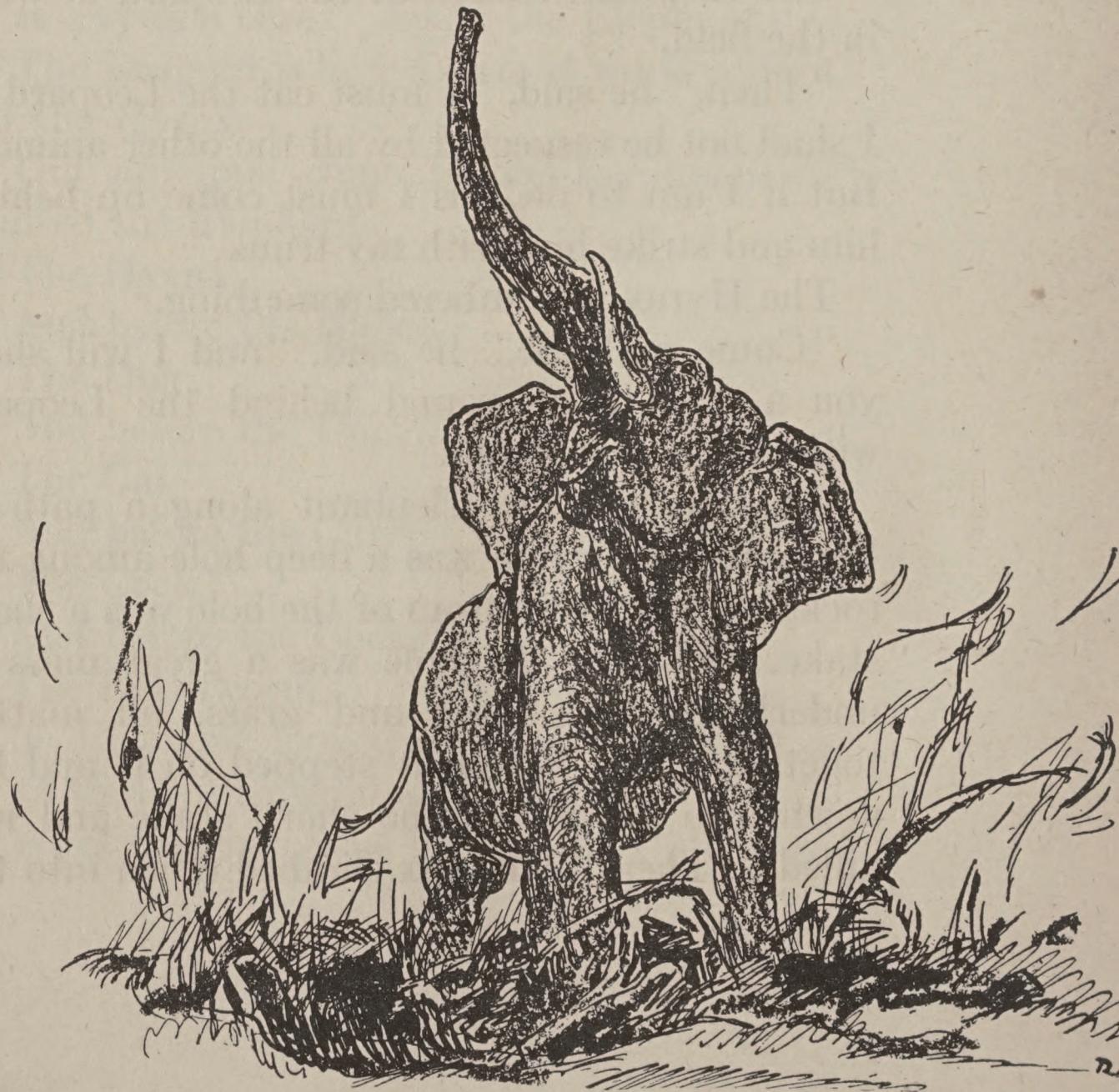
The Hyrax remembered something.

“Come with me,” he said, “and I will show you a way to go round behind the Leopard without his seeing you.”

Then he led the Elephant along a path in the middle of which was a deep hole among the rocks, and in the bottom of the hole was a sharp stake, and over the hole was a great mass of underbrush and vines and grass, all matted together. The Elephant stepped on it and fell down into the pit on the sharp stake and was killed. Then the Hyrax climbed down into the

pit and skinned him, and brought the skin home to his wife.

All the people laughed and clapped their hands and said that the story was a good story, and some of them began to sing and dance again. Mpoko climbed a little farther up among the boughs, crooked his arms and legs around them so that he could sit comfortably, and thought



about the story. It was not so wonderful that the Hyrax had killed the Elephant. Not long before the hunters of the village had done almost the same thing. It struck Mpoko that in almost all the stories the little animal got the best of the bigger ones by wise planning. While he was thinking it over, he went to sleep. When he awoke, later in the evening, most of the people had gone into their huts, and his father with some of the older men sat under the tree talking.

“I am not much like the Hyrax, for I am in a trap myself,” thought Mpoko, in disgust. “If I get down, they will think I have been listening and they will certainly make me eat whip. If I keep still until they go away and then get down, I shall not be beaten unless I tell what I hear, and I shall be very careful not to do that. This is a time for the wise man to stay behind the hedge of thorns,” — which was one of the Alo Man’s proverbs. It means to keep your tongue behind your teeth.

The boy lay along the bough, as flat as a squirrel or a lizard, while the palaver went on. He did not expect to hear anything interesting. It would probably be talk about the crops, or the things to be bought at the next market,

or some such matter. But it proved to be a terribly fascinating discussion. Mpoko kept stiller than ever as he listened. He did not know what would happen to him if he should be found there.

The chief and his old men were worried over the trader's doings. In some of his glass bottles he had strong drink which took away a man's sense and made him quarrelsome and silly. "Drink beer, think beer," the Bantu proverb says; but this was something much worse than any of the mild drinks made by the natives. Even a little of it would lead a man to make the most foolish bargains and tell whatever he knew. The trader was spoiling the country, they said.

Then the Alo Man spoke, and he had an even more dreadful thing to tell. He had once seen this trader coming in from a wild country with about twenty slaves, forked limbs over their necks, chained to one another and guarded by armed men. These men carried weapons which could kill from a distance with a great noise. The trader's bodyguard had them, and might have more hidden among their wares.

This was the worst possible news. All the people knew what slave raids were. They had

lived in fear of Tswki for years and years for this very reason. His army was so strong that he had from time to time come over the mountain and burned a village and carried off men, women, and children to a far country where they would never see their own people again. But for some time now Tswki had let them alone. The Alo Man had heard that in the country beyond Tswki's country there were new rulers and new laws, punishing all who took or sold slaves. If this were so, it would keep Tswki from selling any captives he might take, and would make him afraid to raid the villages of his neighbors.

But the village could not send a messenger across Tswki's country to these new rulers to get help, even if there were time. The trader might have many more men coming to help him. His boat, or dhow, was probably hidden somewhere down the river, and when he had got his slaves he would put them on board and go away. Even if they warned the other villages and all the fighting men joined to drive him off, he could kill them much faster than they could kill his men, with his strange weapons. And finally, if any such fight happened, Tswki would hear of it and might come over the mountain

to help the trader and get their country for himself.

It was a very bad situation, and it looked worse and worse to them the longer they talked. The only hopeful fact in sight was that the trader did not seem to know anything about Tswki. If he had known, he would probably have gone to that chief in the beginning, to buy slaves and to secure his help in getting more. Yet by this time he might have heard almost anything from the men who had sold their good rubber and oil and provisions for his bottles of trade gin.

Plan after plan was suggested, and there was something wrong with each one. At last the men separated and went each to his own hut, all but the Alo Man, who still sat there in the deep shadow, thinking. Mpoko slid very cautiously down on the far side of the tree, but just as he reached the ground the Alo Man spoke his name in a low tone. Then Mpoko knew that the Alo Man had seen him, but that no one else had.

“I went to sleep in the tree,” he said sheepishly.

“You had better forget what you heard,” said the Alo Man.

Mpoko lingered, digging one bare brown toe into the earth.

"Uncle," he said, "we are like the Hyrax who had to trap the Elephant." After a pause he added, "The Hyrax did it."

The Alo Man gave Mpoko a quick glance, pleased and surprised and interested. "What is inside your mind, Mpoko?" he asked.

"This," said Mpoko. "There is a deep elephant pit on the trail over the mountain to Tswki's country. The hunters found it when they were chasing the hyrax today. Tswki has much ivory, and the trader loves ivory. He asks about it all the time."

The Alo Man's mind began to link itself with Mpoko's as one monkey swinging through the tree tops catches the paw of another. "Go on, my son," he said.

"We are a little people," said Mpoko. "We cannot fight the trader. But Tswki could, and he would do it if he were angry. If the trader came to take his ivory, Tswki would be very angry. The trader has many men to serve him. But if they were in the elephant pit, they could not serve him."

"Eh-eh-eh-eh!" chuckled the Alo Man, as a plan dawned upon him. "You are as wise as

the very old Hyrax himself. Go now to sleep, or your head in the morning will be as white as his."

Mpoko was not sure whether the Alo Man really thought his ideas worth anything, or not. But on the next day there was another and a better palaver, and a plan was worked out by the chief and the Alo Man and the wisest of the old men, in which Mpoko, as was only right, had a chance to do his part.

Word went out to all the friendly villages to watch the river for any sign of strange boats or men. When the Arab trader came back from the market, the river villages knew exactly what they were going to do.

The Arab had planned to take each village by itself, beginning with this one, attack the people suddenly by night, kill all who were not able to travel, and send the others down with a guard to the place where his boat was waiting. Before the news of the raids had gone out so that the people of the country could resist him, he would be away.

But now he began to hear stories of a chief on the other side of the mountain who had much ivory. Slaves, in the trade slang, were called "black ivory," but this ivory was the

real kind — solid elephant tusks. It struck the trader that if he could get this ivory and make his new slaves carry it, this would turn out to be a very profitable trip indeed.

The question was, how to get the ivory. From all accounts Tswki was a strong, fierce chief, and it might be dangerous to go into his country with as small a force as the trader had. The Arab had not enough goods to pay for very much ivory, and he did not wish to pay for it if he could get it without paying. He might catch his slaves and go down to the coast, and come back with a larger party of armed men; but after slave raiding here once it would not be nearly so easy to travel through the country again. He thought of trying to get the people of the river villages to join him in raiding Tswki's country, but they all seemed so afraid of that chief that he did not believe they would do it. He kept asking questions about the ivory, and by the time he had finished trading and was ready to go back down the river, he had heard so much about it that he dreamed of it every night. He felt that somehow or other he must have that ivory or he would be sorry to the end of his days.

CHAPTER XII

A VOICE IN THE FOREST

THINGS were very unsatisfactory to the trader on the last night of his stay as a guest in the village. He had intended it to be the last night that he or any of the people of the village should sleep in those huts. But if he carried out his first plan, and fell upon them in the dark hours just after midnight, killing, burning, and plundering, and then taking up his march to the next village to do the same thing, he would have to give up all hope of the ivory. While he was sitting by himself, trying to think of a way out of the difficulty, Mpoko stole up to him in the dark and pulled at his sleeve. "Come quickly," he murmured, "there is a palaver going on behind the ruined huts, and it is about ivory."



The Arab was naturally suspicious, and the life that he had led had made him more so. He had been almost sure in the last day or two that there was something he had not yet found out about that ivory. He knew a great deal about native tribes, and he was aware that they are very good at hiding anything they do not wish to have known. He remembered that Mpoko had been limping about the village as if suffering from a severe beating; indeed, the boy seemed hardly able to walk now. That was just what would have happened if he had heard something his elders were saying and they had found it out. And what could be more natural than that he should revenge himself by telling what he had heard? The trader would have done that himself in Mpoko's place.

Mpoko slid along in the shadow and dropped on all fours, signing to the trader to do likewise. They wormed along through tall grass and thorn bushes and thickets for what seemed hours and hours, in the dark. Mpoko would have liked to lead the Arab round and round the village all night. As it was, they followed a very roundabout cattle track, and the trader's clothes, which were not made for crawling, suffered a great deal from thorns and mire.

At last they reached a pile of ruined thatch and mud wall, and sure enough, there were men on the other side of the heap, talking together in low tones. Mpoko ducked into the shadow and vanished like a scared rabbit. The trader crouched motionless, his hand on his dagger, listening.

“Then everything is ready?” said the chief.

“Everything,” said the smith.

“And the stranger does not suspect?” said the oldest of the villagers.

“I think,” said Mpoko’s father, “that he has quite given up any thought of the ivory now. We have scared him very well.”

“What a joke it will be!” said the smith, “when we tell people that the stranger was afraid of Tswki!”

“A feeble old man without sons,” said one of the hunters, “and all that ivory which the trader, with his strong men armed with the weapons that kill far off, does not dare to go and take!”

“It is all the better,” said the chief, rising. “When the trader has gone, we will get the ivory and carry it to the trading station ourselves.”

Then the group of men went away, and the Arab, gritting his teeth with rage, found his

way back to his own tent. His mind was quite made up. He would break camp early in the morning and go straight over the mountain into Tswki's country and get that ivory and, if possible, a gang of slaves. Then he would come back and punish the villages, and if there were any joke to be told it would be on them, not on him.

He got Mpoko into his hut while his porters were packing, and questioned him closely. It was not for nothing that Mpoko had played biti and other games in which he had learned not to show his feelings. He said that what the trader had heard of Tswki was indeed true. He had not given them any trouble for a long time — many years. Mpoko had heard that there was a stockade of elephant's tusks, all picked for their great size, round the group of huts in which Tswki lived with his family. Remembering what the Alo Man had told of the riches of the king whom he had visited, Mpoko described the carved ivory oil dishes and knife handles, the war trumpets and combs and bowls, which he said he had heard that Tswki had. White men would give many, many brass rods for such things, but until now it had not been safe to try to get them. Now the

villages had agreed to forget all private quarrels and join in raiding Tswki's country. Yes, Mpoko knew the road up the mountain. No, it was not very easy to find. One might get lost in the forest. He would not like to show the trader the way, because it might get him into trouble with his father.

The trader pulled at his black beard impatiently. It would not do to get lost in the forest. Neither would it do to arouse suspicion. Mpoko suggested that the Alo Man also knew the road up the mountain. The trader asked if the Alo Man would be the guide. Mpoko thought he would hardly do that, but he was going to visit Tswki, and Mpoko might get leave to go with him for a few miles and then slip away and join the trader. This seemed a good idea, and the trader agreed. He was glad that the Alo Man would be out of the way when the villages were raided, for he had an uneasy notion that with a good leader the people might give him some trouble. If they traveled fast, they could overtake the Alo Man before they got to Tswki's country and could make sure that he would give them no further trouble.

The Alo Man had already gone when the trader and his men set forth. In fact, he had

gone the night before, although nobody knew it but the chief and one or two other people. Mpoko kept a little ahead of the trader's party, swinging from tree to tree like a monkey, or peering back from behind a thorn bush or grass clump. Just as the trail began to be hard to find, he dropped to the ground and stood waiting for them as they came panting up the path.

Very little was said as the Arab and his men followed the slim brown figure of the boy through the jungle. Every man had firearms, and they had given a little shooting exhibition the day before that had impressed the people deeply. The Arab felt sure that when he got ready to take his prisoners, they would be too scared to make any fight. He expected to have some trouble getting the ivory, but he was not a coward and did not mind fighting when he was sure that he would win in the end. He counted very much on the surprise he would give the old chief when he made the attack. Each one of his men, with gun and revolver, was equal to many Africans armed only with spears, and according to all accounts Tswki depended on the strength of his town there on the hillside and not on a strong guard.

Of course the trader did not know that about

an hour after he left the village, Mpoko's father, with every fighting man he could muster, in full war dress, with feather headdresses, long spears, round hide-covered shields and horn-handled knives, had started up that very trail. The men of the village had come on at such a pace that they had to check themselves for fear of catching up with the men they were following. A scout was sent on now and then to make sure that the Arab was still going up the mountain.

From time to time other parties of warriors came in from trails that branched off into the forest. By the time the belt of forest began to grow thinner and the trail came out on the rocky open ground above, there was a very considerable band of grim, fierce-looking spearmen crowding up through the trees and crouching behind bushes.

Mpoko looked back and caught a glimpse of the flutter of plumes. He pointed up the mountain to a pile of boulders clear against the sky on the top of the ridge.

"That is the way to Tswki's country," he said. "I do not dare to go any farther. I may get beaten as it is."

"You will get something worse than a beating if you don't come," said the Arab. "Come

with us and we will give you a share in the ivory. Go back and you will be killed."

Mpoko had not counted on this. He looked at the pile of rocks far above, and at the sun-burnt bare slope strewn with boulders. He looked at the forest behind. He was sure from what he had seen of the Arab's shooting that he would not live to get back to the shelter of the trees. He dug one toe into the earth and whimpered. "Do not shoot," he said. "I will go."

Laden with their guns, the Arab's men could not climb as fast as Mpoko could, and he kept some distance ahead. The trail made a turn toward the right, about halfway to the top, and here the elephant pit had been formed by the washing out of a deep hole in the rainy season. It was covered over with woven grass and boughs, and it looked as if the long grass had blown over the trail just there. Mpoko scampered across and ducked behind a boulder beyond. Out from the woods came streaming a company of tribesmen, shouting and waving their spears. The Arab looked at the pile of rocks above, and saw that behind those rocks he and his men could defy any number of enemies with spears. The warriors behind them were not

yet within range of the firearms, but they soon would be. The slave traders began to run. If they could not get to the top, at least they could get behind the boulders where the road made that turn.

Then down they tumbled into a great hole. The woven screen of foliage held long enough to let them all get on, and then gave way, exactly as it would do if an elephant were to step on it. The trader's men went down all in a heap, and a revolver or two went off in the confusion. They could hear the yells of the men coming up the hill.

The Arab could not make out at first what had happened. He knew he had been trapped, but he could not see how it had been done. The walls of the hole were of solid rock, much too high to climb, and overhung the bottom of the pit.

Of course, no one could get at him and his men to kill them without taking a chance of being shot, but they could be left there to starve or die of thirst. The Arab had left many of his prisoners to starve or die of exhaustion by the roadside, and now he knew how they had felt. It was not at all pleasant.

A cheerful jabbering seemed to be going on

outside. After some time the Alo Man's voice could be heard, speaking alone. "Listen, men!" it said. "We can do nothing as long as they have their weapons. Let us give them a chance to live. If they give up their weapons, we can talk to them."

The Arab made up his mind quickly. "Let down a rope," he shouted in the clearest Bantu he knew, "and we will tie our guns to it."

After a little talk, a couple of long leather thongs were flung over the edge of the pit. The Arab thought he might be able to keep back some of the weapons, but he found that whoever was in command seemed to know exactly how many there ought to be. Then the edge of the pit was ringed with fierce, feather-crowned faces looking down at the captives, and there was more talk. Finally the slave traders were pulled out and set in the midst of the crowd, each guarded by a tall and active spearman, and feeling very much depressed and frightened.



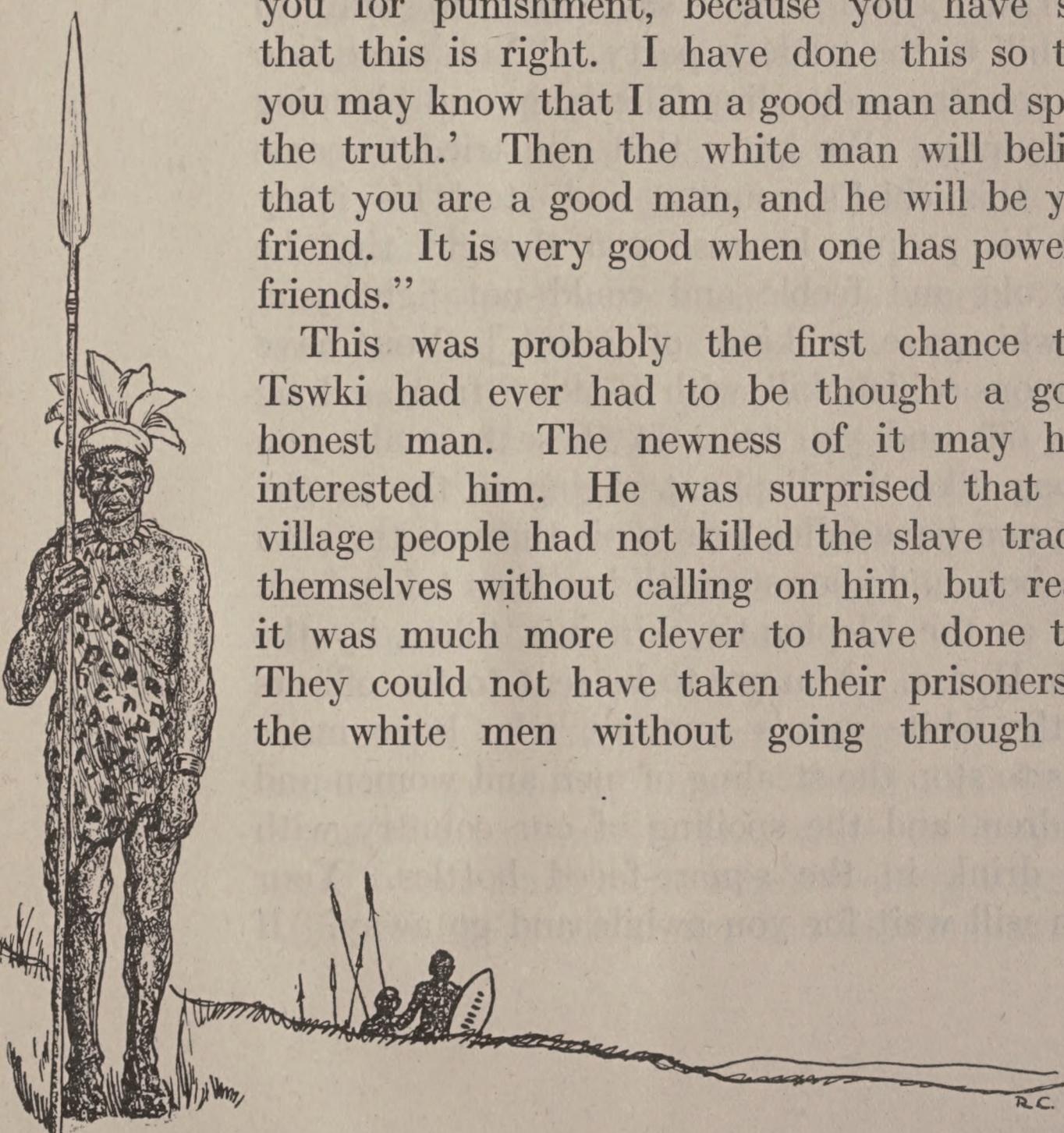
They knew that if the villagers chose to be disagreeable, they could be very disagreeable indeed.

One of the chiefs, a very tall and commanding figure in a splendid leopard-skin robe, was Tswki himself, as the Arab discovered with horror and dismay. The Alo Man was talking to this chief and trying to make him agree to something.

“Hear now this plan,” said the Alo Man, persuasively. “It is true that these men have planned to come into your country and make war, and steal your ivory, and you have seen for yourself that they came with weapons in their hands and sent no messenger to tell you of their coming and ask permission to enter your village. You know also that they are taking slaves wherever they can, against the new law. If you kill them, as they deserve, they will do no more harm, it is true [the Arab’s teeth began to chatter]; but they will do you no good. On the other hand, if you tie them and march them under guard across your country to the white men, they will do you great good. You will then be able to say to the white men: ‘See, I have kept your words in my heart. I found these men, who are wicked

and sell men and women against the law, coming to catch slaves in my country. If you search their packs you will find fetters that they intended to put on the slaves they captured. I did not kill them, although I could have done so. I did not let them go free to carry off the people of some other chief. I have brought them to you for punishment, because you have said that this is right. I have done this so that you may know that I am a good man and speak the truth.' Then the white man will believe that you are a good man, and he will be your friend. It is very good when one has powerful friends."

This was probably the first chance that Tswki had ever had to be thought a good, honest man. The newness of it may have interested him. He was surprised that the village people had not killed the slave traders themselves without calling on him, but really it was much more clever to have done this. They could not have taken their prisoners to the white men without going through his



country. Now he would get the credit of it all. Tswki was not called "The Snake" for nothing. He saw that the plan was a wise one. The snake is thought by African tribes to be very wise.

"Your plan is good," said Tswki finally, after thinking it over. "That is what I will do."

"Listen, you men," said the Alo Man in Swahili to the trader's party. "You came into our country pretending friendship and planning wickedness. We know that you tried to come into this chief's country and steal his ivory and his people, because you thought that he was old and feeble and could not fight you. [Tswki gave a kind of grunt.] You have weapons which kill with a noise from a long way off, and you trust in these to make you strong, like the elephant raging in the jungle. But you have fallen into a pit through the plan of a boy, and your strength has been taken from you as the Elephant's skin was taken by the little Hyrax. You are to be sent to the officers in the white man's country, who have made laws to stop the stealing of men and women and children, and the spoiling of our country with the drink in the square-faced bottles. Your men will wait for you awhile and go away. If

they try to come up the river, we will stop them. Now we have no more to do with you, for you belong to Tswki."

Tswki had been listening attentively to this speech, for he understood some Swahili. He had a word to add.

"If the other men come up the river to steal your people," he said, "we will take them also to the officers to be punished."

This showed how Tswki's ideas had changed in the last hour or two. He had never before said "we" when speaking to a chief of the river villages.

Well pleased with their day's work, Tswki and his men moved off down the other side of the mountain. Well pleased with themselves, the Alo Man, the chiefs, and their people moved off down the slope on this side. They carried with them the goods of the traders, including the guns, revolvers, powder, and shot, which they tumbled into the river.

The Alo Man was happy because, for once, the people of the different villages had united against an enemy; even Tswki had shown signs of friendliness! His white teeth flashed in a joyous smile as he began making a song of triumph about the trader and the elephant pit.

Mpoko also was happy. He was thinking that when he was a chief he would rule wisely and keep his people safe from all enemies, as his father and the other chiefs and the Alo Man had done that day. He was wondering also about those strange new rulers who had said that the stealing of men and women and children must stop, and who did not approve of the drink that took away a man's senses and made him do silly things. Mpoko felt that he had seen and heard and done a great deal since last night.

The people in the village, waiting to catch the first sound of the Alo Man's drum, heard far away the tap-tap-tapping that sent through the forest the glad news that all was right. The women began to prepare all sorts of good things for the evening meal, and as the sun went down upon the peaceful village and the shining river and the great mountain standing up out of the level country beyond the forest, the Alo Man and his company came home.

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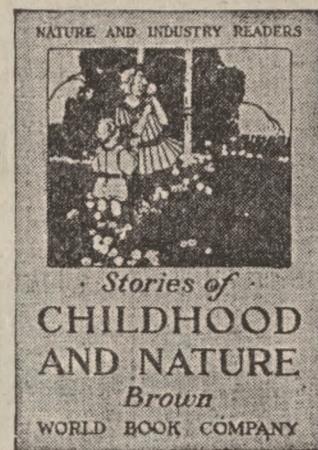
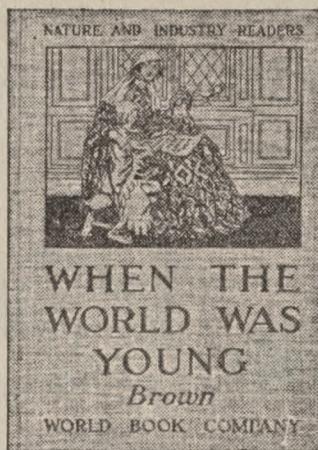
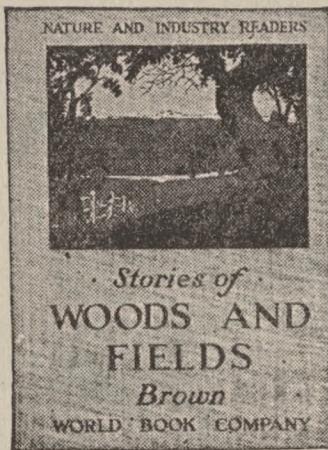
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